


ISABELLA OF MILAN



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*Isabella d'Aragona.
After Beltraccio (Milan.)*

ISABELLA OF MILAN

PRINCESS D' ARAGONA, AND WIFE OF DUKE GIAN
GALEAZZO SFORZA · THE INTIMATE STORY OF
HER LIFE IN MILAN TOLD IN THE LETTERS OF
HER LADY-IN-WAITING

As set forth by CHRISTOPHER HARE

AUTHOR OF "THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS LADIES OF THE
ITALIAN RENAISSANCE," "COURTS AND CAMPS OF THE
ITALIAN RENAISSANCE," "DANTE THE WAYFARER," &c.

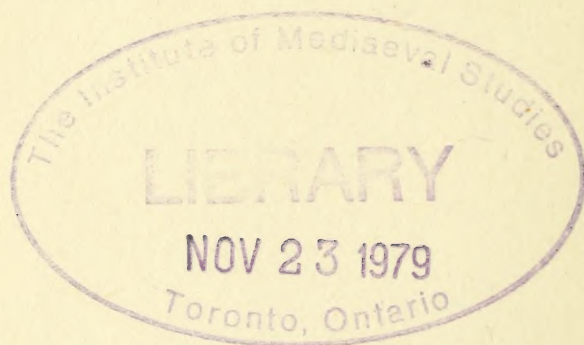
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

153-157, FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

SONNET IN PRAISE OF THE
DUCHESS ISABELLA

“ Per autunno, verno o primavera
O quando in nel leon si trova il sole,
Sempre Isabella è com' essere suole,
Più bella assai che a noi la quarta spera.
Angeliche accoglienze in vista altera,
Atti gravi pietosi, alte parole ;
Sì che natura in lei render ci vole
Ipolita, per cui in ciel si spera.”

BELLINCIONE (1474-1524).



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PREFACE

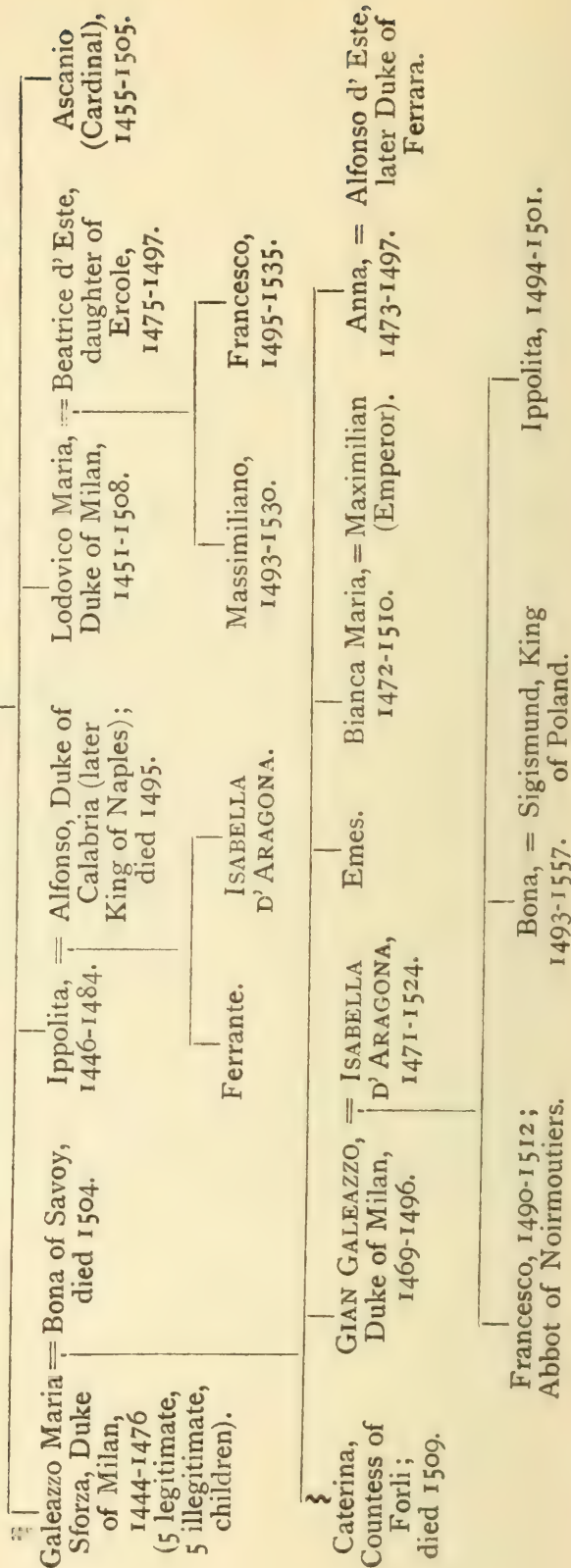
AT the name of Isabella d' Aragona there rises before us the tragic figure of a hapless Princess for whom the world went wrong, a brave-hearted woman who fought alone against all Europe for those near and dear to her. "Madonna infelicissima, unica in disgrazia."

In these pages her story is told with strict historical accuracy of incident, character, and date. But I have attempted to make the past live once more by using the pen of an imaginary eye-witness, a lady-in-waiting of keen insight, intelligence, and sympathy, who tells the "Story of her Duchess" in a series of intimate letters to her sister at Naples.*

* The idea is as old as the hills, but perhaps it has never been more admirably carried out than by the great classical scholar, the Abbé Barthélemy (1716-1795), in his imaginary "Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis en Grèce." In his steps I am proud to follow.

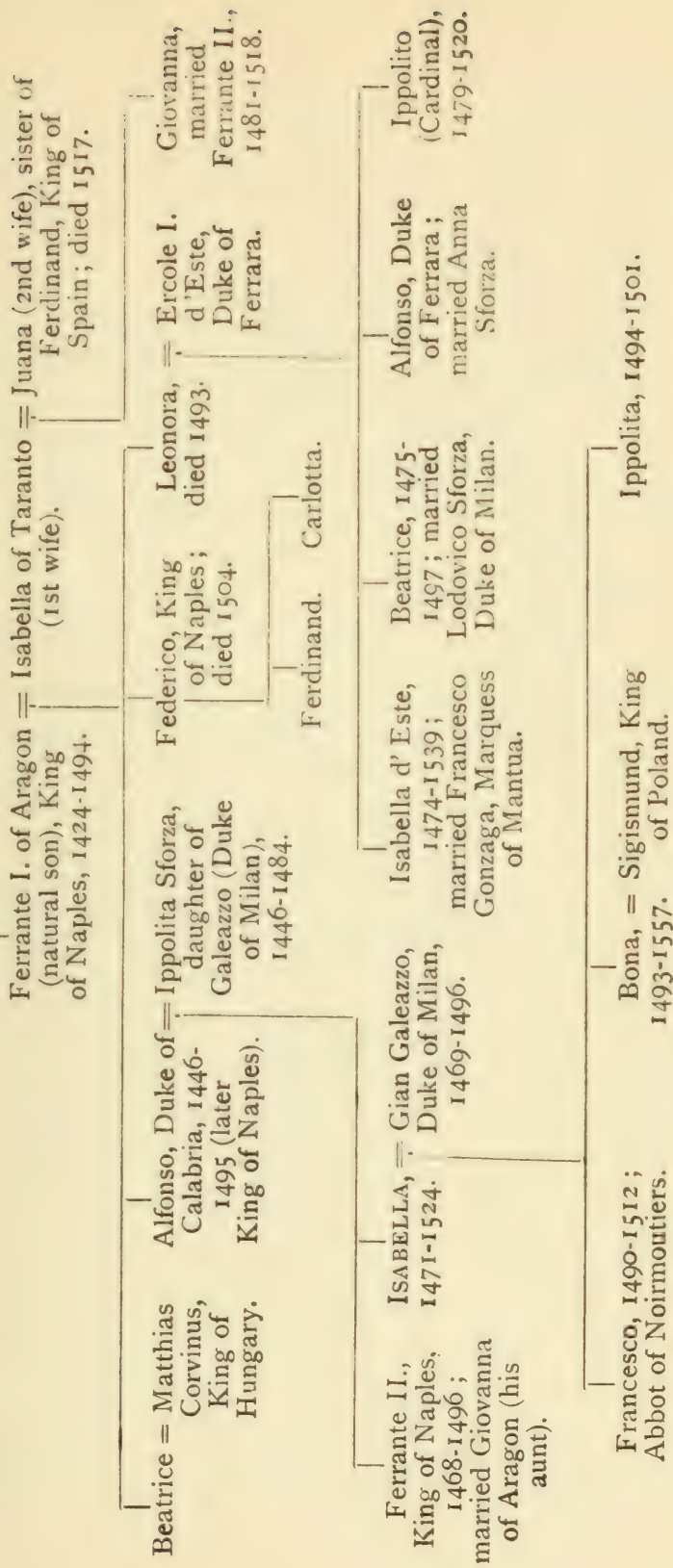
GENEALOGY OF GIAN GALEAZZO SFORZA.

Francesco I. Sforza, Duke of Milan, 1401-1466 = Bianca Maria Visconti, died 1468.
(9 legitimate, 11 illegitimate, children).



GENEALOGY OF ISABELLA OF ARAGON (BRANCH OF NAPLES).

Alfonso V. of Aragon and Sicily.



ISABELLA OF MILAN

THE STORY TOLD IN THE LETTERS OF
VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA, HER LADY-IN-WAITING

PROLOGUE

Scene : The terrace in front of the enchanted Castel del' Uovo.
Sunset view over the Bay of Naples ; the sapphire sea rolling
in long waves towards the white sea-wall, with Vesuvius in
the distance.

Time : An autumn evening of the year 1488.

Persons : Princess Isabella d'Aragona, daughter of Alfonso, Duke
of Calabria, granddaughter of Ferrante I., King of Naples ;
Violante da Canossa, orphan-niece of Simone da Canossa,
Chamberlain to the Duke, lady-in-waiting to Isabella.

WITH a deep-drawn sigh of content, Isabella breaks the
silence. " I did well to come here. They think I need
the change for my health of body, but in truth it was my
soul that craved this peace and rest. Come, Violante,
sit by my side, and I will tell you everything."

" Is it good news, my Signora ?" asked the girl eagerly.
" You have been so strange and silent ever since we left
the Royal Court that my heart misgives me."

" You shall be the judge of that, Violante," said the
Princess in a low voice. " There came a messenger this
morning with letters from Milan to my father. My
uncle the Lord Lodovico Sforza prays him to fix an

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early day for my wedding with the young Duke Gian Galeazzo."

"But surely that is welcome news, my Princess!" exclaimed Violante impulsively. "You were betrothed to your cousin almost from your cradle, and you are now eighteen. . . . These long years of delay have been a slight and an injury to you, robbing you of your rightful place as Duchess of Milan."

"All these years the sword has hung over my head, and now it has fallen," was the grave reply. "I am called upon to leave my home, my loved ones, my familiar life, and go forth to an alien land to meet the dark unknown. Do not mistake me, Violante; I ask for no pity. Mine is the common lot of a Princess, but perhaps I have been too highly trained for blind submission. . . . I spoke to Queen Juana, who was full of sympathy, and won my grandfather King Ferrante's assent; then I prayed my father to give me three days to myself, away from the stir and tumult of Court life, that here in the solitude of our seagirt palace I may break the news to my own soul, that I may realize the coming change, and say an eternal farewell to the dear haunts of my childhood. Only three days for me, and the daughter of Jephthah had two months for her lamentations in the wilderness!"

She turned away, but not before Violante saw that the eyes of her dear mistress were dim with tears. Full of tender sympathy, she poured out her words of comfort with eager haste. "The Jewish maiden had good cause to lament, but there is no tragic sacrifice here! Think of it, Signora! You are called upon to reign over a great State, the home of all the arts, where 'learned men flock like bees to honey'—so your mother was never weary of

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telling us. It was her native place, and to her the fairest and brightest spot on earth. Can that ever be an 'alien land' to you where the Duchess Ippolita spent her courtly and learned childhood? where she sang French songs to welcome the good King René, and where she recited a Latin oration in honour of the coming of Pope Pius II.?"

Isabella could not resist a smile at those oft-told tales. "Dear mother! And it was the one desire of her heart to make us paragons of learning, like herself. It seems to me that we lisped in Latin, and that Virgil was our earliest study; but you were always ahead of me, Violante."

"It may be that mine was the readier tongue, but yours was ever the wiser heart, and you will prove it now, my Princess. You will go with a brave, gallant spirit to queen it in stately Milan, to be the centre of a brilliant Court, with poets and painters and learned men around you. . . . Ah, how your mother would have loved to see this day!"

"You have much to say about the Court, but you make no mention of the bridegroom, Violante," was the grave rejoinder. "I have heard often of the Duke's love for horses and dogs, but rumour is silent about any higher tastes."

"Yet were we not told that the artist Bramantino has but lately painted the Lord Gian Galeazzo as a youth reading Cicero?" asked her companion, with a smile.

"Ah, Violante, you always have the last word, and you see the bright side of everything!" There was a pause, then, with sudden anxiety, the Princess leant forward. "You will come with me, Violante, to my

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golden exile? You will not forsake me at this crisis of my fate?"

"I will never leave you, dear Signora," was the earnest reply. "Do you remember how your mother on her death-bed joined our hands together? That was four years ago, when I was little more than a child myself, but I knew how my mistress trusted me, and my silent vow of faithful service was registered in Heaven. Could I have done less for one who had been more than mother to me from my orphan childhood, who had so early chosen me as your companion in lessons and play, and to whom I owe everything?"

"Then here we seal our compact, my Violante, and together we go bravely forward to meet the unknown future!" cried Isabella, with a new ring in her voice. "Come, we will go to the shore, for not one moment will we lose of these three precious days. We will live again in the happy past, and forget there is such a word as 'to-morrow.'"

She kept her word. The two maidens revisited together all the ancient haunts of their childhood, ever keeping alight the watchfully guarded flame of gay, careless enjoyment. They wandered wherever their fancy led them, protected and served by silent attendants, boatmen, and others, whose duty was to gratify every passing whim of the Princess and her lady-in-waiting.

As their little barque rippled through the still waters of the Bay, they could look back from afar upon the fair city from whence they had fled, with its battlements and towers, its green gardens and sentinel palm-trees, clambering up in picturesque chaos from the dark blue sea below. They could hear the music of distant bells, and recall the days when "the heavy toll of the alarm-bell

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rolled along the shore," warning the fishermen and the guards of the coast that pirates were at hand.

" All' arme, all' arme ! La Campana sona ;
Le Turche so' arrivati a la marina !"

seemed to be ringing out once more. To these cultured ladies every legend, every dim tradition of the past, was familiar. They knew all about the undying dream of buried treasure on those mysterious haunted sands, the countless jewels in the caves of that fabled sea, which the merest chance might bring to light at any moment.

The dark memories which clung around the lonely church of San Lionardo were no secret to them, and they passed by those grey walls with a shudder and a whispered prayer for the souls of the dead. The high-born Neapolitan girls knew where the villa of Lucullus had once stood, and they were sure that in the silent glowing twilight hours the ghost of Queen Giovanna, of evil memory, still flitted mournfully through the broken arches of her ruined palace. But above all other haunts of their pilgrimage, they loved to visit the tomb above the grotto which leads to Pozzuoli, claimed by tradition as that of Virgil the Enchanter. His poems were familiar to these young scholars as household words from their childhood, and they were never weary of quoting from his Pastorals the sad farewell of Melibœus to these very scenes of beauty and enchantment.

But all things come to an end, and these three days in Paradise might not last for ever. The third evening was drawing to a close, and the boatmen were bidden to row slowly as, with chastened hearts, Isabella and Violante turned their faces homewards to their appointed place.

The sun was setting on a scene of surpassing loveliness,

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and before them the walls of palace and battlement and tower were glowing with the reflected gold of the sky, while the sea was spread out like a shimmering sheet of opal. Then, even as they watched, came a slow change. Soft tints of purple descended over the glorious light, the shadows of the city grew violet, until at length domes, towers, and terraces faded away into cloudland. They looked back to see the enchanted Castel del' Uovo, which they had left, still glowing with opalescent colours and reflected in the calm waters as in a mirror, until the soft mysterious radiance had melted away and the gates of fairyland had closed behind them.

* * * * *

Violante da Canossa had an ordeal awaiting her on her return home that night to Naples. She must break the news of her coming departure to her twin-sister Agnese, the invalid girl, stricken by some mysterious disease unable to move from her couch, whose life was one long martyrdom of pain and weakness. Every minute of delay seemed to make the task more difficult, and Violante hastened at once to her sister's room, where the moonlight, pouring in through the window, made the recumbent figure look like a marble effigy on an altar-tomb. With a stifled cry the girl sprang forward.

"Is all well with you, my Agnese?" she asked in a low, caressing tone. "You had my message that I was summoned in haste by the Princess Isabella? These three days we have been away at the Castel del' Uovo, and . . . I have news for you. . . ."

"Do not distress yourself, dear Violante: I know already," was the quiet reply. "My uncle has told me that the long-expected wedding is at last to take place, that the King is greatly excited about it, and has com-

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manded the most magnificent preparations to do honour to his granddaughter."

"But, Agnese, do you see what this means to us? We have never been parted for more than a few days, and now . . . I have promised to go with the Princess to Milan." She paused, and her eyes were dim with tears; but it was with a gay, cheerful voice that her sister made answer:

"Surely you had no choice, Violante? She needs you far more than I do, for you know how tenderly I am cared for by our dear Queen Juana.* Believe me, I have long foreseen and made ready for this change. Duty calls you to an arduous, anxious task, where you will need all your courage and talent. And as for the loss to me, remember that if we are no longer together in the body, nothing can ever part our souls. My thoughts and prayers will be always with you, my sister."

Such heroic unselfishness almost took away Violante's breath; then there came to her a flash of inspiration.

"Listen, Agnese. I have thought of a plan which will keep us in constant touch. You know that I am ready with my pen, so that I could write down day by day all that befalls us in far-off Milan—all that we see and hear and think of. Thus in my letters you will share every feeling and experience, so that no distance can ever build a wall between us. We will be one in spirit to the end, my Agnese."

These were her spoken words, but they gave no measure of her inward devotion. The girl had always thought of her twin-sister as a saint, but now she felt quite sure of it. Yet, at the same time, this was a saint with so tender

* Second wife of King Ferrante of Naples, and sister of Ferdinand, King of Spain.

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a sympathy for human frailty that nothing of good or evil would ever come to her as a surprise. Poor Violante found wonderful comfort in the knowledge that here was a gentle and wise Confessor, to whom she might always bring her doubts and difficulties, in sure confidence of help and advice. More than this, Agnese had the rarer gift of a joyous heart, which could take delight in every passing ray of happiness, ever ready to be glad with the gladness of others as well as take part in their sorrow. With such a sister to share and lighten her task, Violante knew herself to be rich indeed, and the following pages will tell how she carried out her compact.

LETTER I

IN THE CITADEL OF GAETA,

This 1st day of January, 1489.

AL NOME DI DIO.

Already, my Agnese, it seems to me an age since that parting, on which I dare not let my thoughts dwell. Yet, in very truth, it is scarcely a week ago since we set forth from the palace gates and took part in that magnificent procession, that stately pageant, such as Naples in all her glory has never seen the like of before.

How the people cheered us to the echo as we rode in gallant array down the narrow streets, to the flare of trumpets and beating of drums, while the banners of Aragon and Sforza waved proudly in the breeze! No Queen ever passed forth in more splendid triumph than did my Princess Isabella that day, beautiful in her robe of purple velvet, her ermine mantle, and the jewelled crown on her head; her ladies like a garden of flowers around her in the midst of her princely bodyguard. You remember, Agnese, when through the window you watched the coming of the Prince Erme, with his train of four hundred noble lords and gentlemen of Milan, in their splendid attire and gold chains and jewelled plumes, you exclaimed: "They are all magnificent as so many Kings!" But not one of them equalled in dazzling splendour the Lord Erme* as he rode by the side of his

* Son of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, and brother of Gian Galeazzo.

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brother's bride in his surcoat of white brocade, embroidered with gold, with a cape of rose-coloured damask on one shoulder, a shining helmet with waving plumes on his head—as he sat erect on his massive black charger or bent forward to whisper words of compliment to the Princess.

No woman could be cold before such flattering homage as a scene like that implied, and it gladdened my heart to catch sight of the bright eyes and glowing cheeks of my dear Signora, as she turned to listen to the young Prince. He is but a lad of nineteen, but he may prove a good friend to her in her new life, for it seems to me that he has a pleasant, honest face. That day he attained the height of his greatness, for hitherto he and his company had been the guests of the King of Naples, but now it was his turn to be host, for a great banquet was prepared on the State galley, which, with its five companion vessels, was moored in the harbour. All the great chests of baggage, the wedding presents, and the stores of provisions were already on board; but it would take some time for the grooms to embark the horses which had taken part in the procession, and this interval was to be turned to account with a parting feast, an hour before noon.

Never was there a more gallant spectacle than our beautiful harbour presented on that gala day. Every little boat was in holiday array, and no words can describe the marvellous effect of our stately ship, with its great coloured lateen sails, flags and banners and tapestry hung everywhere, radiant in the sunshine, and the blue sea and sky beyond as a fit setting for the whole. Think of it, Agnese—a splendid fleet of six such fine vessels to bear us on our way, with a favourable wind and every promise of a propitious journey. King Ferrante and

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Duke Alfonso were in their most gracious mood, and showed the keenest interest in every detail of the arrangements on board, and spoke in high praise of the fine seamanship of the Genoese sailors.

I will not weary you with the list of rare dishes—the stuffed peacocks, the Hungary soup, the quince pies, the thrushes stuffed with scented citrons, and endless more dainty food—but I will tell you of what will please you better : the words of serious meaning which caught my ear amongst the gay talk. By good fortune my place chanced to be facing the Lord Ermes, and the Duke of Calabria was close by, for whom it was plain to see the young Prince was full of admiring worship. In all modesty, he asked about that famous victory over the Turks at Otranto, now seven years past, and put questions to Duke Alfonso regarding the transport of armies and the modern treatment of armour. In this talk, young Lord Ermes had occasion more than once to praise the practical talent of his uncle, Lodovico Sforza, which I could not fail to notice was listened to somewhat impatiently, until at length the Duke exclaimed :

“ Does it never strike you, my Prince, that this same Lord Lodovico takes too much upon himself, seeing that your brother, Gian Galeazzo, is the true ruler of Milan ? ”

“ No indeed, my Lord Duke ; you cannot know how needful and precious is my uncle’s wise experience for our State of Milan,” was the simple loyal reply.

Strangely enough, from much that I have heard, I am quite prepared to share our Duke’s suspicions with regard to this most wise Lodovico, whom I shall watch with close anxiety in the coming days, although I could but admire the outspoken honesty and trust of his young nephew.

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The banquet was but of short duration, for, the tide serving us, we were to set sail soon after noon. I will not dwell upon the leave-taking between our Princess and her father, the Duke, as well as her loving grandfather, King Ferrante; but of this you may be sure—that the Lady Isabella has too much self-control to betray her feelings in public. It was a comfort to her that her young brother Ferrante was to head the escort as far as Milan, and take part in the great marriage ceremony. Also, as you know, she was to have the company of many other friends—the Contessa of Terra-Nuova, the Duke and Duchess of Melfi, the Conte di Consa, the Conte di Potenza, and various trusted companions, beside her bevy of ladies-in-waiting, who were all chosen by herself. Yet, remembering what a solemn and tremendous event is the leaving of home and country, maybe for ever, I was glad to find that a festal Court was to be held on deck, as soon as we had sailed clear away from the dear harbour of Naples.

The Princess Isabella was conducted in state to a kind of raised throne in the centre of a gay pavilion, hung with brocades and tapestry and decorated with flowers, while we all took our places around her. In the suite of gallant cavaliers from Milan were many distinguished gentlemen who had already made our acquaintance—the Seneschal Ambrogio da Corte, Don Simonetto Belprato, Rolando Pallavicino, Vitaliano Borromeo, Gasparo Visconti the poet, and various others—who all vied in their desire to give interest and pleasure to the gay discussions which followed. The courtly Bishop of Como was always ready to discuss any serious point which arose without undue solemnity, and to welcome any brilliant repartee or witty rejoinder. Then, after a while, the Lord Ermes, ever eager to do the honours of his position, brought forward

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the famous poet of Milan, Bernardo Bellincione, to pay his homage. As he bowed low to kiss the hand of the Princess, she welcomed him with a smile. "Your fame has long reached me, Messer Bellincione, and you have done me great honour in thus braving the perils by land and sea to escort me to Milan."

"In your honour, fair Duchess, I would dare to face far worse adventures than these. How can I serve you, Eccellentissima? Shall I tell you a story from Boccaccio in this setting of sea and sky, as fair as the spreading trees and the flowery bowers, with birds singing to welcome the dawn of day in his valley of ladies?"

"Nay, Messer Bellincione; will you not recite to me a Tuscan sonnet of your own?" she asked, with her ready tact and courtesy.

Thereupon he began, after a brief pause, with this sonnet, somewhat in the nature of an impromptu in praise of the Duchessa Isabella:

"O chiara stella, anzi qual vero sole
D' onesta, di bellezze e di virtute,
Rare eccellenzie mai più non vedute
Per te natura e' l ciel mostrar ci vuole."

*

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When the Princess had duly praised these charming lines (had they served many a fair lady before?) our own poet Serafino entered the lists, and chanted verses of his own composing to the soft accompaniment of the lyre. Meantime, such of the noble lords who had a taste for more frivolous amusements, beguiled the time on the farther deck with a company of jugglers and buffoons, until, after supper, we were all glad to close the evening entertainment with a delightful concert of sweet music, with singing and the harmony of clavichord and viol, with

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other stringed instruments. But these Arcadian pastimes were not destined to last long, for that very night there came a change in the fair weather, and we woke to a dark and gloomy sky, with a lurid light in the eastern sky, which boded no good to our voyage. The wind was dead against us, and was steadily rising until the great sails became quite unmanageable, and it was as much as the sailors could do to climb aloft and furl them, with the mighty yards swinging about, to the peril of their lives.

We dwellers by the coast know the ocean in all its moods, but as the storm grew and the waves beat tempestuous about us, breaking aboard everywhere, sweeping over the high poop, and washing the deck as far as the beak at the stern, it was a terrible experience to the gay lords from Milan. The gallant company, so full of mirth and enjoyment only the day before, was now miserable and depressed, for the noble landsmen proved to be very bad sailors, and those who were not laid up by sickness were pale with alarm, for the great ship rolled from side to side, and seemed so perilously top-heavy that each moment it was like to go head foremost to the bottom. There was much earnest conversation with the Captain, and at length the Lord Ermes approached the Princess Isabella and informed her that we could not face the gale, and our only chance was to make with all speed for the harbour of Gaeta. He made a brave effort to treat the matter lightly, but he could scarcely keep his footing, and his countenance was of a most ghastly hue. My Signora thanked him for his courtesy, and expressed her perfect confidence that all would be done for the best.

Yet, indeed, it proved no easy matter to reach our haven safely, and, to make matters worse, we had at length to go ashore in small boats in the midst of a

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drenching hail-storm. The Commander of the fortress came down to meet us, and to offer the daughter of his King the best hospitality which this grim old citadel could provide ; but the greater number of the company had to be content with remaining on board the galleys, which in time all reached the harbour safely, although they tossed about in a lively way at their moorings. It is on our arrival at this shelter, a half-furnished room in the massive tower of Gaeta, that I write without delay to you, my Agnese, to set your heart at rest, for this storm must have been a terrible alarm to all our friends in Naples.

The Prince Ferrante is sending a post-messenger by land to his grandfather the King, and I make haste to avail myself of this chance to give you my news. And so farewell. Pray for our safe voyage, and trust ever in the loving affection of your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER II

IN THE PALACE OF TORTONA,

This 26th day of January, 1489.

AL NOME DI DIO.

When I last wrote to you, Agnese, from the citadel of Gaeta, I little thought that for five long days we should be kept by stress of weather in that gloomy and desolate spot. For so, indeed, it was to us all, though the Commander and his gentle wife and all the garrison did their very utmost to provide us with suitable hospitality and entertainment. But the weather was terrible beyond all words. We had heavy storms of sleet, and even snow; no fires seemed able to warm the gloomy prison-like abode, and we suffered cruelly from the cold. The lords and gentlemen from Milan did their best to enliven the long hours with music and dancing, but we were all so desperately eager to continue our journey that our efforts at amusement were very half-hearted. Time was passing on, while we knew that, even with favourable weather, it would be as much as we could do to arrive at our appointed meeting-place at the time expected by the Duke of Milan and the Lord Lodovico Sforza.

It was not until January 5 that at length the Captain of our galley, on whom rested the chief responsibility, decided that we could continue our voyage. It seems that I was quite right in my suspicion that all those Genoese galleys are somewhat unstable in rough weather

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and with a heavy cargo, such as ours had on board. After that spell of contrary winds we set forth with a prosperous breeze and in the best of spirits after our long confinement. But all our company had received a sharp lesson, and the careless, unthinking merriment of our first day was tempered by more sober thoughts. This mood was most clearly set forth in my Duchess, as I must henceforth school my tongue to call the Princess Isabella, for to all the world she is now known as the "Serenissima Duchessa di Milano." Already at Gaeta she had shown special delight in the society of the Bishop of Como, Messer Pallavicino, and other learned men, and together they had trod that classic shore in search of the tomb where lies buried the faithful nurse of Æneas. You will remember those lines of Virgil :

" Tu quoque littoribus nostris, Ænëia nutrix,
Æternam moriens famam, Caieta, dedisti ;
Et nunc servat honos sedem tuus."*

Now, as we sailed along in full view of that fair coast where the past lives again, it was a joy to recall those memories of old. We gazed upon the Formian villa of Cicero, where the great orator met Pompey and enjoyed the society of Scipio and Lælius, and we were told that behind those groves still flowed the Fountain of Artac a, where the wandering Ulysses met the Princess of the Læstrygones. Farther on, where the bold promontory of Circe stretches out into the sea from the Pontine Marshes, we heard once more the enchanting tale of that famous enchantress, her island, and her spells. But on this I must not dwell, as the present has too many vivid claims upon my pen.

* "Æneid," vii. 1.

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It had been arranged that we should touch at the harbour of Civita Vecchia, where, Pope Innocent himself being unable to meet the bridal party, Monsignor the Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, the uncle of my Duchess,* received us with great honour. We continued our voyage after but a brief delay, and on January 7 arrived without adventure at the famous port of Livorno. A noble company of Florentine lords, deputed by the great Lorenzo dei Medici, met us there, and most courteously invited us to land, which my Duchess was the more willing to do, as she had suffered somewhat from the sea journey. We were most hospitably entertained in the Governor's house, and treated with sumptuous banquets and feasts, which the younger members of our gallant escort so thoroughly enjoyed that we prolonged our visit during four days.

I will not dwell upon the rest of our voyage, which was prosperous on the whole, although we were delayed at times by contrary winds ; but after six days at sea, we at length arrived here at seven o'clock on the evening of January 17. Our reception was on a princely scale, for we were saluted with salvos of artillery and the ringing of bells, while all the great people of the city came down to meet our embarkation. I will mention only those of chief importance, such as the Doge Agostino Doria, with his charming wife who was the hostess of the Duchess and her ladies ; Galeotto, Prince of Mirandola, and his wife, the noble Lady Bianca d' Este ; Count Annibale Bentigoglio and Madonna Lucrezia ; and the Cardinal Sanseverino, the most striking figure of a warlike prelate that I ever beheld.

* Son of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, brother of Ippolita, who married Alfonso, Duke of Calabria.

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My Duchess entered the ancient city in royal state, with a stately *baldacchino* borne over her head as, to the martial music of trumpets and drums, she passed up from the crowded harbour through the narrow streets, on by the Cathedral Piazza, until she reached the splendid palace of the Governor. Here we remained for a rest of five days ; but I will not weary you with the full story of our magnificent feasts and entertainments. Above all things, my Duchess enjoyed the pleasant society and friendly sympathy of the noble ladies I spoke of—Madonna Bianca d' Este of Mirandola, the beautiful Lucrezia Bentivoglio, and the Princess Andrea Doria—all charming and cultivated women, to whom it was hard to say farewell. But in this changing life of travel, we must needs pass on quickly from one pleasure or anxiety to another.

As you see, we have braved the perils of wind and waves, and reached our final port of Genoa in safety. But I must warn you, my Agnese, that the hardships of our journey were by no means at an end, and as I look back upon that awful ride over the mountains from Genoa to Novara, I can only marvel that I am alive to tell the story. Picture to yourself my poor Duchess and her unfortunate ladies-in-waiting, in our rich and costly dresses, suitable for State receptions, riding through deep snow up narrow mountain paths, on the perilous edge of rocky ravines, where one false step would plunge us into eternity. It was indeed well for us that, instead of the Court pages, my Lord Ermes had insisted upon each one of us having a sturdy mountain guide at the bridle of our frightened horses ; for when there came on a blizzard of wind and snow we could but close our eyes, cover our heads completely in the fur hoods, and blindly cling on to the saddle. As it was, Anna the old nurse, and that

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fragile Julietta Fornara could endure the cold no longer, and they would have died had not some kindly goat-herds given them hospitable shelter in a rough mountain hut. I need scarcely tell you that never did my Duchess fail in courage and spirit, and for very shame the most delicate amongst us could not complain of suffering from cold and hunger which our mistress endured without a word. When hot spiced wine was prepared for her refreshment, she would insist on sharing it with her ladies, and even when we had to spend the night in a rude shelter, on beds of straw covered with furs brought up by the baggage mules, the most faint-hearted could not grumble when the Princess Isabella treated it as a merry adventure.

At length, to our great content, we reached Novi early on the next day, where we were safe beyond those savage mountains, and had but an easy journey before us to Tortona, where we could enjoy rest and refreshment and repair the ravages of the journey. This was to be the eventful meeting-place, and you may fancy with what anxiety my Duchess rode forward to meet her future husband, Gian Galeazzo, Duke of Milan, who, with his uncle, the Lord Lodovico, had been awaiting her arrival in the old Lombard town. The young Duke was on horseback, in a splendid hunting costume of green velvet trimmed with gold, and his face was partly hidden by the sweeping plumes on his cap.

Must I own to you, my Agnese, in these lines, which your eyes alone will read, that the first sight of the future bridegroom was a terrible shock to me? I saw before me a small, insignificant figure, with a pinched sallow face of sickly appearance and a sulky mouth. I know what you will say, in your loving charity—that the casket does not always reveal the treasure contained within . . . and



Photo, Anderson.

Luini.

GIAN GALEAZZO SFORZA, DUKE OF MILAN.

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I will add no more until fuller knowledge, although I must own that he seemed greatly attracted by his bride, and was most attentive to her. His uncle, Lodovico, who rode by his side, was a fine personable man, with very dark hair and complexion, whence possibly arose his popular name, "Il Moro." He too was in splendid array, but he wore his clothes as though they were a part of him, and seemed in no way conscious of them. It was he who came forward in eager welcome of the Princess with simple hearty words, and having thus set the young couple at their ease, he drew aside to let them take the lead together in the procession. There was an irresistible charm about his manner, as he found something friendly to say to each of us ladies, inquiring most kindly about our welfare after the hardships of the journey. For my own part, I must own that, in spite of my secret prejudice against the Lord Lodovico, I was quite taken captive by his pleasant courtesy, and could fully understand the charm which he is said to exercise upon all who approach him.

We were now once more in a civilized world, for the old castle of the Governor had been rebuilt lately, and is full of every convenience and luxury. Indeed, my sister, you must give wings to your imagination to realize the unheard-of splendour of the great entertainment prepared for us that day. We sat down to a banquet in which we mortals were transported to the Olympian shores, and the gods and goddesses themselves condescended to serve us at table. Each course in succession was a lesson in mythology. A calf stolen from the herds of Admetus was brought to us by the radiant Apollo, Atalante led captive the wild boar of Calydon, and Diana followed, with Acteon in her train, changed into a splendid stag. Then Iris came in with a smile,

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bearing upon her shoulder a peacock which had graced the car of Juno, and Jason flaunted before us the Golden Fleece. Thetis and her attendant sea-nymphs brought to the banquet a wondrous choice of beautiful fish, Pomona piled our plates with grapes and apples, while the fair Hebe tripped lightly round to fill our gold and silver goblets with the rarest of wines.

Then from the hills of Arcady arrived a group of shepherds crowned with ivy, bearing their pastoral offering of milk and honey. But the most delicate compliment of all came last, when Orpheus was seen to arrive with a flight of birds, which he vowed had flocked around him to listen to the melody of his lute, as he sang wild ditties in praise of our Princess Isabella of Aragon, the new Duchess of Milan. Did you ever hear of a mere banquet thus transfigured into a real triumph of talent and imagination?

For this we had to thank our friend Bernardo Bellincione, in whose poetic mind the beautiful idea had taken its rise. When my Duchess spoke glowing words of praise to the delighted Court poet, he hinted that all this was nothing to the scenes which were to celebrate the wedding at Milan. And moreover, he told her in confidence that the classic dresses she so much admired had been prepared from drawings of that great master of design, Messer Leonardo da Vinci.

And now, my Agnese, I must bring this long letter to a close, for the Lord Lodovico is about to send a messenger to Naples with news for the King of the safe arrival of his daughter Isabella, and he will bear my letter with it. The ever-loving devotion of your sister, and I pray God to give you a happy life and Paradise at the end.

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER III

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN.

This 5th day of February, 1489.

AL NOME DI DIO.

My last letter was written to you on January 26, on the day after that wonderful mythological banquet at Tortona. It was finished in haste, for the messenger was waiting, and I had no time to tell you of the strange vagaries which accompany a royal progress. Picture to yourself, Agnese, that it was the right etiquette for the young Duke Gian Galeazzo and his gallant company, with his uncle, the Lord Lodovico, to leave us at Tortona, and return to Vigevano, where they were to await our coming. Surely it would have been kinder for the bridegroom to alleviate our tedious journey by his presence, instead of allowing his Duchess to remain another day at Tortona, and then travel on as far as the little village of Scaldasole where, after a long, cold ride, we were only too thankful to stay the night in humble quarters. It was not until January 28 that we reached Vigevano, and were again met and received by the Lord Lodovico and the young Duke.

I well know what my Agnese will say as she reads all this record of travel. I can hear you asking: "Tell me about the real things which matter, Violante? Will this young Prince prove a worthy husband for our dear lady? Is he brave, and honest, and loving?" It is

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too early, my dear sister, for me to answer these questions with any confidence. I can only say that on that second meeting his devotion left nothing to be desired. Instead of the first stately greeting, when he bowed to kiss the hand of his bride, he rode forward impulsively and kissed her on both cheeks. . . . He is evidently charmed with her beauty and fascinated by her bright, lively talk, so that we may well hope she will have great influence over him. My dear Duchess keeps up her spirit and courage in a marvellous manner, but I cannot help seeing that she avoids any private talk with me, as though she dared not trust herself to that full confidence of the happy days of old, when every thought and feeling was transparent as the day. We can but pray God that all will turn out for the best.

After one night's sumptuous entertainment at the Castello of Vigevano, the Duke Gian Galeazzo and his uncle again left us and returned to Milan, to make preparation for a magnificent reception of the Princess Isabella. The stately ceremonial of our journey was henceforth solely concerned with my Duchess and her suite. When we reached Abbiategrasso, we found three splendid Bucentaurs awaiting us, in order that we might have a smooth and easy journey by water to Milan. But before embarking, another unforeseen and most important meeting awaited the bride. It was no less a personage than the mother of the young Duke, the widowed Duchess Bona,* of whom we had formerly heard such strange stories. You will want to know my impression of this much-talked-of lady? For one thing at least I am ready to love her, as she is truly delighted

* Widow of Galeazzo Maria, Duke of Milan, sister of Charlotte of Savoy, wife of Louis XI. of France.

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with her son's marriage, and is most kind and friendly to my Duchess, who insisted on having me in attendance at her interview. I thought her very gushing and inconsequent in her talk, but this may be partly owing to her bringing-up at the French Court with her elder sister, Charlotte of Savoy, the wife of King Louis XI. She has only just returned from Paris, where she took refuge after that scandal with her favourite, Tassino, which you will remember. I had always thought her a most unwise person, and I was the more convinced of this when I heard her unguarded remarks about the Lord Lodovico, whom she now cordially detests, although there is a kind of armed neutrality between them. I actually heard her say :

“ Isabella, my love, I trust you to protect my poor boy against his uncle, who has quite bewitched him. What a fool I was to invite Lodovico back to Milan ! But I never suspected his horrible ambition. Mark my words, he will make himself Duke of Milan some day, if you are not strong enough to stop him.”

What could my poor Duchess do but change the subject, and express her gratitude to the Duchess Bona for her kind visit ? “ I felt that I must come, dear, just to warn you ; but I do not know what people will say. Of course, I am expected to welcome you to Milan, so I must hurry back there to-morrow morning,” was the somewhat disconcerting reply.

However, my Duchess most wisely does exactly what she is told, and interferes with none of the arrangements. She took an affectionate leave of her mother-in-law, and then made ready to embark on the magnificent Bucentaur, which was hung with flags and tapestry for her final entrance into the city of Milan. Fortunately, the

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weather was now fine and bright, although much colder than we are accustomed to in the South. Crowds of the country people were watching our progress from the banks, and about halfway we were met by a gay, fantastic Bucentaur, with a fair company on board of seventy beautiful damsels, clothed in flowing Eastern costumes, who welcomed my Duchess as their Queen, with homage of songs in her praise and wreaths of flowers. As we reached the city we were greeted with salvos of artillery, with the flare of trumpets and martial music ; the Dukes were awaiting the Princess Isabella, and a splendid procession was formed to pass through Milan. It was headed by a company of five hundred stradiots, mamelukes, and archers on horseback ; then came all the great nobles of Milan, in superb costumes, and in the centre rode the bride and bridegroom, with a gorgeous *baldacchino* held over their heads. My Duchess was magnificent in a robe of white brocade and an ermine mantle, with a crown on her head ; her horse was led by Messer Pallavicino on one side and the Conte Borromeo on the other, both on foot ; and amongst the company was Messire Piero dei Medici,* in a splendid robe of cloth of gold. We ladies of her suite rode close behind her, and the rest of the company followed us, while the people shouted their greeting and applause the whole way. Never have I seen anything so magnificent as the decorations of the houses : festoons of laurel and ivy hung from the balconies, which were covered with gay brocades and tapestries, so that the walls were almost hidden ; there were bands of gold suspended from the windows, and bunches of golden apples and other adornments.

In the middle of the road, the Goldsmiths' Company

* Son of Lorenzo dei Medici.

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had placed a huge gilt ball, with four golden griffins round it, and a column with a lion at the top. But, indeed, there was so much that I could neither see nor describe the half. At the portico of the great Castello my Duchess was received by the Princess Bianca, sister of Duke Gian Galeazzo, a tall, dark, handsome maiden of sixteen, with her little sister Anna by her side. She embraced her new sister-in-law with every show of formal affection, but to my mind she had a haughty manner, which seemed to imply that it was an act of condescension on her part. This Princess has already been twice betrothed : once to the young Duke of Savoy, who died ; and now to the son of the great Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary. But of her I shall have more to tell you another time.

In the absence of the Duchess Bona, who was indisposed, Bianca Maria did the honours of the Castello, the most splendid fortress I have ever seen, with its massive towers and strong walls. But within, it is a magnificent palace, most sumptuously furnished, although I learnt later that many of the rare tapestries on the walls were borrowed by Messire Lodovico from great nobles and merchants of Milan, and even from the monasteries. We were conducted through spacious halls to a room in the Camera delle Torre which had been specially prepared for my Duchess, and of which I will spare you the description, except for the great carved bedstead, which had a gorgeous coverlet, embroidered with five golden lions. The wedding ceremony was to take place the next day, and that night my Lady Isabella would have no one near her but myself. I dared not question her or even try to speak faltering words of comfort and encouragement, lest the self-control for which my darling fought so bravely,

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should utterly break down. She was pale as death, but she shed no tears, and her silence was more eloquent than speech. I, who watched over her, know that the whole night was one long vigil, spent in prayer and meditation. But when the morning dawned, her sweet face was calm and untroubled. Alas ! she was cold and stately as a marble statue. The victory was won, but at what a price none would ever know.

I can but trust that my unspoken sympathy held some mysterious comfort for my dear Duchess, as she kept me by her side while her tire-women clothed her in those exquisite wedding garments which you saw at Naples : the long robe of white brocade, sewn with pearls, and the mantle of cloth of silver, with only pearls and diamonds for her jewels. When all was ready, again we set forth in stately procession from the courtyard of the old Castello, down the Via di Dante, and through the street of the Goldsmiths and the Armourers, the beautiful city with its splendid decorations glittering in the sunshine, with hanging garlands of juniper and orange, until we reached the exquisite duomo of white marble. Beneath the sculptured porch, the bridegroom, clothed in sumptuous white and silver, with a vest of raised gold brocade, a diamond ornament and a big pearl in his cap, met the Princess, and, taking her by the hand, led her through the dim nave, where the great company of all that Milan holds of rank and magnificence was assembled to do them honour.* When the stately marriage ceremony was over, and the wedded pair knelt before the high-altar, the chequered light from the painted glass windows seemed for a moment to shower light and joy upon their

* A letter of Stefano, attendant of Piero dei Medici, tells the same story.

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bowed heads . . . yet it was through a mist of tears that I looked upon the gorgeous scene, which will live in my memory until my last hour.

After Monsignor Federico da San Severino had recited the wedding oration, and the supreme sacrifice was accomplished, I was too dazed to do more than follow the remaining proceedings like one in a dream. Agnese, in this hour of deepest emotion, I must speak the truth, if ever after I try to forget it! He is not worthy of her. The bright, gallant spirit of my dear mistress is linked with one far below her, weak alike in mind and body. The sole glimmer of hope is that he seems devoted to her. I can only pray that she may not fully realize her sad lot until custom has deadened her feelings, and her patient struggle to guide and lead him may have awakened somewhat of maternal pity in her heart.

Never forget us in your prayers, my sister, and may God watch over and protect you in your lonely chamber.

From your own

VIOLANTE.

LETTER IV

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,
The 28th day of February, 1489.

AL NOME DI DIO.

Your precious letter, my Agnese, reached me at Milan, shortly after the wedding. Would that I could have saved you that anxious time of waiting to know how we weathered the storm, which had seemed so terrible to you in your sheltered chamber, with the boisterous gales beating around! I can see you weeping tears of joy when my welcome letter reached you from Gaeta. And since then I have written from Tortona and from Milan, this being my fourth epistle since our parting, dear sister.

I must take up the thread of my story from the wedding ceremony itself, when the Duke and Duchess were escorted with great state back to the Castello, and placed in possession of the splendid suite of rooms prepared for them in the Corte Ducale, all draped with white satin, as is the fashion in these parts. I have already told you that the halls and passages were hung with priceless tapestries—many of them borrowed for the occasion—a type of the curious mixture of real extravagance and mere outward show so common here. One room I specially admired: the Sala delle Columbine, painted with doves and flowers in the midst of flames, the favourite decoration of the Duchess Bona. Still, I must own that I would gladly have exchanged some of this grandeur for

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a little warmth and comfort. The great chambers were so cold and draughty that my Duchess begged to have one of them lined with wood to keep out the cold, and to have glass put in those windows which had only linen. As for the ladies-in-waiting, in order to reach the upper rooms we have commonly to use an outside staircase, exposed to all the bitter winds of this Northern land, unless we are allowed to avail ourselves of a narrow spiral staircase in the Torre delle Asse.

But I must turn from these small troubles to tell you about the splendid pageants in honour of the wedding. That which my Duchess most enjoyed was a masque which had been written in her honour by our friend the Court poet, Messire Bernardo Bellincione. It bore the ambitious name of "Il Paradiso," and the great Florentine painter Messire Leonardo da Vinci had devoted great skill and talent to the making of a celestial sphere, or Paradise, in which the seven planets—Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon*—were all represented by actors in splendid and appropriate costumes, such as Dante and the ancient poets describe, and each in turn sang in sweet melodies the praise of my Duchess Isabella. It was indeed a triumph of art, and the lady thus honoured could not say enough in praise alike of the poet and the artist. She found great pleasure in conversing with Messer Leonardo, who for the past five years has taken up his abode in Milan, under noble patronage. He is a man of many and marvellous talents—a painter unrivalled, a sculptor, an architect of palaces and fortifications, a master of design for all stately pageants, and, I am told, also a poet and a musician.

* * * * *

* See Dante's "Cielo Cristallano."

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My letter has been interrupted, dear Agnese, by the sudden illness of the Duke Gian Galeazzo. After the performance of that splendid pageant "*Il Paradiso*," the Court all moved from Milan to the Castello of Pavia on February 6; but we had scarcely arrived when the Duke fell into a deep faint, and when the Court physician and astrologer, Messire Ambrogio Rosate, was sent for in haste, he declared that the young Prince was suffering from an attack of fever, consequent on too much fatigue and excitement. As I told you, his health has always been delicate, and the constant entertainments and banquets of the last few days have been more than his strength could stand. My Duchess remains in constant attendance upon her husband, never leaving his bedside, and his only desire is to have her talk to him and amuse him. The great doctor Messire Alvise Marliani has been sent for from Padua, and could find nothing more comforting than to foretell that "the Prince would take a turn at the change of the moon." He has also ordered several strange and loathsome decoctions, which the Duke refuses fretfully to touch, and I cannot blame my lady for suffering him to have his way, as we have not much faith in those boasted nostrums.

It was in the early days of the Duke's illness—on the 10th of February—that my Duchess had to take her last farewell of her brother Ferrante and the other noble friends of ours, as that was the day fixed for their return to Naples. It was like breaking the last link with her home and her people, but the Princess was very brave, and gave no sign of the depth of her despair. It so chanced that some hours later, the Signor Lodovico, who has been most attentive in his visits to his nephew, paid him a long visit in his sick-room. I was in attend-

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ance, and I noticed that, as usual, his talk was all about amusements—hunting, dogs, hawks, and horses—but that he never made any allusion to matters of State. When he left, my mistress joined me in the antechamber and, to my distress, I found her in tears. The events of the day had been too much for her, and startled her from her stern reticence. She put her arms round my neck and sobbed :

“ Violante, it is more than I can bear. I have tried in vain to rouse my husband to a sense of his proper position. He, who is the real Duke of Milan, is quite content to be a mere cipher, and to leave everything in the hands of his uncle Lodovico, who treats him like a child. Surely, Violante, you must have noticed, ever since we left Naples, that it is the Lord Lodovico who makes all the plans, who gives all the orders, who is consulted about everything, and whose slightest word is law. We are mere pasteboard figures dressed up for show, and I really think his nephews and nieces are greater slaves and more devoted to him than anybody else.”

In vain I tried to comfort my poor Duchess, urging that these were but early days, that if his own relations loved the Duke of Bari, he must have some good qualities, . . . and I ended by saying that her influence would soon induce the young Duke to assert himself.

“ How little you understand, my poor Violante !” she exclaimed. “ Before we left Milan I made a great effort to induce Gian to assert his rights, to insist upon making all important appointments, and knowing about foreign treaties and the internal affairs of the State. He seemed to listen as though he agreed with me, but when his uncle came, ten minutes later, he told him every word I had

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said, with great amusement, as though it were some merry jest. After that, tell me what hope there is."

I was silent, for in truth, Agnese, what could I say? My poor Duchess! Mated to a fool, who cannot even hold his tongue!

It is a relief to write all this to you, my Agnese, the only soul to whom I dare breathe a word. And I know so well what you would say, in your gentle voice: "Have patience, child. Nothing is ever so bad as it seems. Trust to time and to the influence of a strong mind over a weaker one, for these are early days to despair. . . ." But no more of this, for we must hide all anxious fears and forebodings, and show a cheerful face to the prying eyes around. It is as though I had given you a momentary glimpse into a deep abyss, and then carefully covered it up—for ever.

What shall we talk about? I will try to give you a description of this ancient city of Pavia, which has been a favourite residence of the Dukes of Milan as, from its position near the meeting of the rivers, the Ticino and the Po, and with the well-wooded country round, it is a splendid centre for sport of all kinds, more especially hawking, as the water-fowl and herons flock to the marshy banks. They call the city "Pavia of a Hundred Towers," and it is a most interesting and attractive place, with its massive red-brick fortifications, its walls and gateways set down in the midst of a fair sunny plain, kept ever green and fertile by the fast-flowing river. The streets have an air of gay prosperity, with their show of goodly wares, the marble palaces here and there, and the many painted loggias, where the wives and daughters of the merchants can take their ease and watch the gay Court life passing to and fro.

But what would interest you most is the great Ateneo

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which is said to owe much of its prosperity to the patronage of the Lord Lodovico, for of late years it has become one of the finest schools of learning in all Italy. There are Professors of Medicine, of Law, of Literature, and the Fine Arts. My Duchess is looking forward to making the acquaintance of Giorgio Merula of Alessandra, the great classical scholar and historian who teaches rhetoric in the University, for you know what a delight she ever takes in learned men. Ambrogio da Rosate is Professor of Astrology, but the stars treated him badly when they suffered him to choose so rough a season for our voyage to Genoa. I have already met some of these learned professors in the splendid library of the Castello, where they are always welcome to consult the precious collection of rare books and manuscripts, treasures constantly added to by generations of Visconti and Sforza Princes. I must not omit to mention a wonderful clock we have there, made by the famous Dondi, which not only shows the whole solar system—how the sun, the moon, and other planets move in their courses—but also rings a peal of bells at every hour. But, indeed, I cannot tell you all the curious and beautiful things collected here. The Castello itself is magnificent, with its banqueting-hall, blazoned with the coats of arms of Visconti and Sforza—the viper, the brush, the griffins, and the eagles. It is used by the ladies and gentlemen of the Court for dancing in the evening, while in the beautiful Sala della Palla, they play ball with a vigour which would amaze you, on wet days after dinner. On fine days they disport themselves in the exquisite gardens, laid out with fountains, groves, and statues, and rich in fair pavilions and pleasure houses.

There will be excellent hunting later on, for the park

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is stocked with game of all kinds, and in all these outdoor sports we are told that the young Duke is at his best. So we will await his recovery with all hope and eagerness, and I trust it may not be long delayed, seeing the devoted care with which my Duchess watches over him.

Pray for us, dear Agnese, for you know our need, and may all your wishes be fulfilled in this world and the next, is the earnest petition of your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER V

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,
This 4th day of July, 1489.

AL NOME DI DIO.

Your dear letter has come at last, my Agnese, and I am comforted, for your quick instinct will have understood the reason of my long silence. How can I ever forgive myself for my rashness and blind folly—for the awful risk I incurred of bringing disgrace and shame upon all whom I loved ?

Agnese, my wise sister, my better conscience, you have saved the situation, and made it possible for me to write to you henceforth with a glad, free heart. Directly I read your opening words I understood everything. Was ever an unspoken reproof hidden by such charming tact ? I must quote the sentence which I repeat to myself again and again :

“ Do you remember, dear Violante, how, in our playful days of childhood, the idea came to us to compose a cipher by which we might send little jesting messages to each other which no one else could read ? The combination of letters was so exquisitely simple that it used to baffle the wisest scholars and experts. Shall we play at being children again, my Violante, and recall the use of that old cipher sometimes in our letters ?”

Then you began those familiar signs, and, think of it, Agnese, after a few minutes of bewilderment, the whole

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meaning came back to me, and I found that I could read every word of those mysterious hieroglyphics. And to prove it, I also will try my hand at them. [Cipher follows.] How can I be thankful enough for my marvellous escape after my folly in writing high treason with a light heart? For you tell me that all my letters, and amongst them that last rash confession, in which I spoke my mind so openly, have reached you safely and with the seals intact. I see now that my confidence to you would have been a cruel betrayal of my dear Duchess if any prying eye had caught sight of it, and, alas! in a Court there are spies everywhere! But if this peril is avoided, consider what dangers threaten every messenger. Why, only last week there was a rumour here that an envoy from the King of Spain had been set upon in a lonely place by armed men, and his scattered despatches were found on the ground near his dead body. I shudder at the thought of past dangers, but henceforth I will learn wisdom and prudence from you, and all secret matters shall be securely hidden in our childish cipher.

How true your words are, and what a clear insight you have for the deep secrets of the soul. You ask what chance has any girl, and above all a Princess, of meeting with a paragon when she goes forth in ignorant blindness to marry an unknown man? No reports from a distance can be trusted, for with a Prince, his flatterers are certain to give a pleasing and false account of him, while on the other hand, with a royal bride, the fair portrait which precedes her is too often but a mask of deception. We must all share the common lot. If our lady has found pitiful weakness in her mate, she must rouse all her courage to give him of her strength, and be thankful if she has not to deal with wickedness also.

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Can we think that happiness—that most rare treasure—is to be expected in such a dangerous adventure as a political marriage? Surely in these straits all that any mortal can hope for is to be acquired by the soul itself—contentment in due time, the power of self-control, the honest pride of self-respect, and the mighty influence for good of a noble life. . . .

You have raised me from the depths of despair, and I wait in hope that when the hour of full and bitter awakening shall come to my Duchess, and once more she may tear aside the veil—as on that one occasion of which I told you—then may I be able to whisper some faint echo of the comfort you inspire, and hand on from you the glowing torch of hope and courage to my dear lady. [End of cipher.]

In this magnificent Castello of Pavia we are enjoying all the pleasure and amusements which the early summer here brings in its train. The lovely gardens are now at their best, for if they have not the variety of tropical plants which we possess at Naples, yet art has done all that is possible in collecting the flowers and trees of colder climates. You will remember what a fearless rider the Princess Isabella has been from her childhood, for she was always the favourite companion of the King, her grandfather. Now she has her fill of this delightful exercise, for her young husband is devoted to horses, and he has given her the most beautiful Arab mare which I have ever seen. We ride every day in the great park, and the courtiers often let fly some of their falcons to chase the herons and water-birds by the river-side. The Duke Gian Galeazzo is devoted to all outdoor sports, and is looking forward very much to the hunting season later at Vigevano. But for some weeks past his thoughts

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have been entirely taken up with the great tournaments we have had at Pavia. You will remember that they were to have taken place at Milan after the wedding, but were put off on account of the Duke's illness.

We have all been the gainers thereby, for such open-air entertainments are far more delightful in this warm, sunny weather than in wintry frost and snow. I must tell you all about these warlike pageants, for I know how dearly you love them, my Agnese. No one would believe, to see your fragile body, that you have in truth the gallant heart of a knight and a warrior. A broad meadow at the edge of the park was chosen for the ground, and was made ready in the shape of a great oblong, and enclosed with high palisades to form the lists. Openings for the entry of the knights were made to the north and south of the enclosure, barriers or stout gates, quite five feet high and wide enough for two horsemen to enter riding abreast. On the eastern side, where the grass rises in a gentle slope, a splendid royal pavilion was erected, with a canopy above to protect the noble guests from the sun, and the whole magnificently decorated with coloured tapestry, brocades, and coats of arms. There were other galleries of less pretension on the opposite side, and beyond the lists were the pavilions of the knights taking part in the tournament, while around, the numerous attendants—armourers, farriers, and others—had their tents, to be close at hand in case of need.

No expense was spared to make the preparations as complete as possible, and notice of the great event was sent forth by heralds far and wide, until we were all in a very fever of expectation. The propitious day had been chosen by the Court astrologer, Maestro Ambrogio,

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and this time it dawned calm and beautiful, so warm that we were thankful to be protected from the sun's rays beneath our outspread canopy. At each of the entrance gates there was a body of men-at-arms, wearing silk tunics of the Sforza colours, to support the heralds and the marshal of the lists. Our young Duke and the Lord Lodovico, Duke of Bari, took the greatest interest in all the arrangements, but the leader and chief of all was the gallant Lord Galeazzo San Severino, of whom I have told you already. It was he who was sent last year with a company of troops to defend the Madonna Caterina Sforza at Forli, when her husband was murdered by the rebels, and she so gallantly seized the citadel.

Count Galeazzo, at the head of twenty cavaliers, had challenged any other twenty knights who would dare to meet them in open combat, to come forth and enter the lists. I need scarcely tell you that the Duchess Isabella was chosen Queen of Love and Beauty for the occasion, and took her place, splendidly dressed in embossed silver brocade, on the throne of honour, in the midst of a perfect galaxy of fair ladies and nobles, all in magnificent costumes, to grace the pageant.

When all was ready, there was a flourish of clarions and trumpets, and heralds proclaimed aloud the laws of the tournament, and that, "this being a festival of peace and joy, the combat was to be fought with arms of courtesy (not *à l'outrance*, as in actual battle).

"That the Lord Galeazzo had sent the first defiance, with his twenty followers, to all comers; that an equal number were to meet on each side, and that the prize to the winner, who should shiver most lances, would be many yards of splendid silver brocade."

When the herald ceased, there was a sudden move-

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ment in the great sea of shining helmets, waving plumes and serried lances outside the barrier and, headed by the Count Galeazzo, all his brilliant company, two by two, rode into the lists from the northern gate. They were clad in gilt armour, with scarves on which their crests were embroidered, glittering helmets with great plumes drooping gracefully behind, and emblazoned housings to match, on the golden trappings of their horses, whose fiery mettle they could barely restrain. All eyes were fixed upon them as the knights rode slowly across the ground, lowering their lances to salute, as they went before the Queen of the Tournament, and then passing on to touch the shields of those who had answered their challenge. This they did with the reverse of their lances, to show that arms of courtesy alone were to be used. The champions then turned back and followed their leader to the far end of the lists, where they remained in a dazzling row.

Then the opponents came forth from their tents, sprang on their horses, which were held ready by pages, and advanced to meet the challengers who had touched their shields. There was a moment of breathless suspense before the clarions sounded, and at the signal the two companies rode furiously at each other at full gallop, and closed in the centre of the lists with a great shock, many a horse recoiling back on its haunches, while the lances carried on the rest,* pointed at helmet or shield of the adversary, were splintered to pieces. There was a terrible mêlée, and in the clouds of dust it was impossible to distinguish which knights were hurled to the ground, for in that tremendous charge it seemed at first as if most of the riders had been dismounted. But as the victorious knights recover their horses with bridle

* On the right side of the cuirass.



Ambrogio da Predis.

BIANCA SFORZA, DAUGHTER OF LODOVICO SFORZA.

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and spur, there are loud shouts from the spectators, though I must own that some of the ladies turn pale and faint, as they recognize a friend amongst the defeated, prostrate and stunned on the ground.

The trumpets sound again, and from the eager cries of "San Severino" we learn that the company of our champion, Count Galeazzo, is the winning side, and see them gallop back to the end of the lists and receive from the attendants fresh lances, with waving pennons. Once more there is another encounter, where more knights are unhorsed and lances shivered; then a fight between unhorsed men with battle-axes—which look very terrible, but, I am told, are too light to break in the helmet—and finally, amidst a perfect babel of applause, the Count Galeazzo San Severino is proclaimed the triumphant champion, having unhorsed most of his foes; and he advances, amidst the waving of scarves and handkerchiefs, before the Queen of Love and Beauty, my dear Duchess, who presents him with the prize.

I must tell you that I was sitting next to the beautiful Signora Cecilia Gallerani, the recognized mistress of Duke Lodovico, who is treated at Court with almost as much honour as if she were his wife. Of course, this is very deplorable from our point of view, Agnese, but it is an amazing fact that the most distinguished members of the Visconti and Sforza families have all been illegitimate, and yet treated in almost every respect like their lawful kindred. I will only quote as examples the great Francesco Sforza, head of the family; Galeazzo Sforza; Caterina Sforza, the famous Madonna of Forli; and a charming little daughter of Duke Lodovico, Bianca,* who is to marry one day the hero of this tournament.

* Illegitimate child of an unknown mother.

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But to return to the Lady Cecilia, who has taken a fancy to me, and has even invited me to her delightful literary evenings. She is a young lady of high birth in Milan, and it is now eight years since the Lord Lodovico has been absolutely devoted to her. She is as learned and accomplished as she is lovely, and she reads her own sonnets and Latin orations to the poets, philosophers, and learned men who flock around her at her palace in Milan and her charming villa near Cremona. This fair lady has had her portrait painted by the great artist Leonardo and her praises sung by Bellincione, Scaligero, and our other poets, who compare her to Aspasia for beauty and charm, and to Sappho for accomplishments and learning. But I shall be able to tell you more about her when I have accepted her invitation, which I am the more anxious to do, as Signora Cecilia has great influence with the Duke of Bari. It would scarcely beseem the dignity of my Duchess to be intimate with the lady, although they are on terms of friendship and courtesy. She gave me much interesting information about the laws of tournaments, and about the armour in special use for them. She admired the perfect aim of Count Galeazzo, who always struck the helmet or shield of his opponent with such a firm and straight blow. But she called my special attention to the paramount importance of having a perfectly trained horse ; indeed, some of the chargers show such marvellous intelligence that they seem wiser than their riders.

It seems that tilting armour is much strengthened on the left side, where most of the blows fall, and the pauldron, or shoulder-guard, is larger also on that side. In former days, when the whole armour was much heavier and often screwed on, the unhorsed knights lay on the ground like

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logs, and had to be picked up by the attendants. The arms and horse of a knight who falls are forfeited to the victor or have to be redeemed at a high price. But you must be growing weary of my long letter, Agnese, and I will end once more with my faithful love, and pray God for your peaceful happiness in this life, and the joys of Paradise in the next.

Your loving

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER VI

IN THE CASTELLO OF VIGEVANO,

This 29th day of March, 1490.

AL NOME DI DIO.

We are here, dear Agnese, in this most beautiful Palace of Vigevano, the old Lombard town, ever beloved by the Sforza family. It is well placed on a hill above the Ticino, in the midst of fair gardens, and surrounded by an immense park, which is a most perfect centre for hunting. It was the Duke Lodovico who transformed the old castle, by means of that skilful architect Maestro Bramante, into a fairylike Palazzo, with towers and arcades, and beautiful lacelike tracery, and delicious chambers, with windows looking out on a scene of Arcadian beauty.

The city was fortunate in being the birthplace of the Lord Lodovico, and he cannot do enough to improve and beautify it. The old church has been restored and enriched with pictures and statuary ; the Roman forum has been carefully repaired and restored to its ancient state ; while great aqueducts have been built to bring water to this dry land, and so cause " the desert wilderness to rejoice and blossom like the rose." This has been a most useful work, and the Sforza Prince has also greatly encouraged the husbandmen of the district by making a wonderful farm here. He acquired a large extent of land (either by force or purchase), and caused canals to

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be dug, to bring water from the River Ticino. Then he had mulberry-trees planted for the feeding of a quantity of silkworms which he sent for, and he also made fresh vineyards in the new and improved way. The farm buildings are quite princely ; I often go to see them with my Duchess, who delights in all the animals, which are the pick of their kind : horses, oxen, cows, sheep, goats, and all the young creatures—the foals, calves, lambs, and kids. These are all taken care of in the most perfect manner by a whole host of herdsmen, who have a village of their own, close by, for themselves and their families. In the beautiful dairy they make those famous Milan cheeses which are thought worthy to be sent as gifts to foreign Princes.

I cannot say that our Duke Gian Galeazzo takes much interest in this model farm ; he cares more for his hunting and hawking than for anything else. He enjoys the great park here, which is well stocked with game of every kind, such as chamois and deer, hares and pheasants, and in the wilder, more wooded parts, there are even fierce wild beasts, wolves and wild boars. At this time of year, in the hunting season, life is now one round of ceaseless sport and gaiety. We are a large party, for Signor Lodovico and the whole Court are with us, including the Duke's mother Bona, who has been persuaded to join our party, as her daughters, the Princesses Bianca Maria and Anna, are here. Just now she can think and talk of nothing else than the marriage of her daughter Anna with the young Alfonso d' Este, son of Duke Ercole of Ferrara, which is fixed for next summer, when the bridegroom will be fourteen and his bride seventeen. The young Prince was betrothed as an infant in arms. We shall miss Anna Sforza very much. She is so gentle and

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charming that my Duchess is devoted to her. The two ladies are both splendid riders, and enjoy hunting together immensely. But with regard to the Duchess Bona, I must add that she is a very trying companion : she is so foolish and utterly wanting in tact that one never knows what she will say.

I will try to describe to you how we spend our days at present, and you will realize how earnestly we pursue our pleasures. Yesterday we set forth early, to the joyous call of the huntsman's horn, as we were bound for a beautiful wooded valley at some distance, which we wished to reach before the sun attained its full heat. Tents were placed on the edge of the woods, where dinner was ready at twelve o'clock, after we had seen the stags and wild goats driven in across the river, so that they would have to climb a very steep hillside, where they could not escape the pursuit of the dogs. This took some time, and after a light repast, we divided off and took the route appointed to us. My Duchess kept close to her husband on this occasion, for he was eager to lead her in pursuit of a wild boar, which the beaters had roused, and presently, to his great delight, she was in at the death. Later in the afternoon we saw a wolf go by, and though it was closely followed, it was more fortunate than the boar, and the poor creature succeeded in making his escape.

Our most successful and finest hunter is the Count Galeazzo San Severino, who distinguishes himself in this, as in everything he undertakes. Only a few days ago he faced a wounded boar, which had gored several dogs, and killed him on foot, single-handed. He is so courteous and kind, that we ladies always feel quite safe if he is near at hand. It was not until the evening was drawing

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in, and we were all wearied out with sport, that we turned homewards, and rode gaily back through the woods, with laughter and singing. As a fitting close to the day's amusement we found a splendid banquet prepared for our supper, and you may well believe that we did full justice to it. Afterwards we had more singing and the music of viols, and two Spanish girls danced before us in a new and graceful fashion, for we were all too weary to dance ourselves, and it was Count Galeazzo who had thought of this amusement.

Speaking of amusements, I have never told you about my visit to the Signora Cecilia Gallerani, of which I promised to give you a full account. It was on a beautiful summer afternoon that I went to one of her delightful entertainments in the lovely garden of her villa. We sat in the pleasant shade, under the spreading trees, with the soothing music of running water near, and choice flowers around us. As for the guests, they were quite a galaxy of famous people in art, in music, in song ; wise philosophers, brave captains, and delightful poets and writers of romances. I cannot remember half their names, but Matteo Bandello, a young friar, was there and the painter Leonardo da Vinci ; Niccolo da Correggio, distinguished alike as poet and musician ; Gaspare Visconti ; my old friend Bernardo Bellincione the Court poet ; and many others. Some Court ladies were present, but we had a large proportion of cavaliers. I suppose that is needful for a successful literary meeting.

I wish I could give you some idea of the bright flow of talk, the eager discussion, the brilliant repartee ; but there is nothing more evanescent than the charm of conversation : it cannot be served up cold. Bellincione was induced to recite to us an admirable sonnet, which

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he had written on the portrait which Leonardo painted of our fair hostess. He sang of that living beauty which would gladden the heart of generations to come; the pictured canvas which would be the wonder and joy of all time, by a marvellous union of Art and Nature. I will send you the sonnet, Agnese, written by the poet's hand.

Then Messer Galeazzo suggested that, in the perfect setting of that fair garden, we should have a story from the "Decameron." Would the Lady Cecilia read one to us, and all should discuss it afterwards? There was a chorus of entreaty, and Bandello opened the illuminated book at hazard. "My Signora," he cried, "chance has given us the tragic story of Federico and his beloved falcon, which he killed to do honour to his lady—that precious bird, alas! which would have saved the life of her child."

Cecilia put the book aside, and her eyes filled with tears, while a hush of dismay passed through the assembled company. Somebody near me whispered: "She cannot forget her own little son Leone, whose death was such a grief to her and the Lord Lodovico two years ago."

Matteo Bandello quickly saved the situation. "If you will permit me, I will now read you, most gracious lords and ladies, the amazing tale of the patience of sweet Griselda." In case you do not clearly remember the story, I will briefly repeat it to you, Agnese.

There was once a great lord, Gualtieri Marquess of Saluces, who, desiring an heir for his broad estates, chose for his wife a most beautiful maiden, the daughter of a poor shepherd, first making her promise that she would blindly obey him in all things. There was a splendid wedding, and the Lady Griselda showed herself worthy in all respects of her high position. When a

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daughter was born to her, sorrow and trial began. Her husband took the child from her, saying she must die, as she could not inherit his title. Some years later a son was born, and he also was torn from his loving mother, with the taunt that the grandson of a peasant was unworthy to be a Marquess. Griselda bore these cruel outrages with touching patience, believing that both the children had been put to death, although in reality they were being carefully brought up at Bologna. Some years later came another scene in that savage comedy. Gualtieri declares that he has received from Rome a Bull of divorce ; he will find another wife, and Griselda shall go back to her father's mud hut in absolute poverty, and mind her sheep. Even this trial she endures without a murmur. She passes out of the palace gates barefoot and bareheaded, clad only in a chemise, and resumes her peasant life.

The Marquess continues his barbarous conduct by sending for her after some years, and telling her that, in her peasant dress, she is to be mistress of the ceremonies on the occasion of his second marriage. Even this is not too much for her fortitude. She invites and graciously receives all the great lords and ladies of the neighbourhood, after having herself prepared the feast. The Marquess presents to her as the new bride her own daughter, now a lovely girl of twelve, and her little son as his future brother-in-law. "What do you think of her?" asks the Marquess Gualtieri.

"My lord," replied Griselda, "she seems as charming as she is beautiful. But I entreat you to spare her all the afflictions of the first wife, for she is too young and too delicately brought up to suffer so terribly. The other at least was only a peasant."

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Then comes the crisis, which the listeners so ardently hope for. The husband opens his arms to his very dear and very patient wife, and gives her back her two children, his heart and his wealth.

"What think you of this patient Griselda?" asked Bandello of his hostess. "With all respect for Boccaccio, I think she was a poor fool, who deserved her suffering. For my part, I have no patience with her!" was the ready reply. "No woman with any self-respect would endure such injustice." The friar smiled, and looking round, happened to meet my eyes. "What would you have done in her place, Signora?" he asked me. "I should certainly have left him at the very beginning of this ferocious comedy," I answered hotly. "I would have had him tried as the murderer of his daughter, and looked upon him as a madman and a brute!" "Then you would never have arrived at the happy ending, my poor Signora," was Count Galeazzo's quick retort.

The discussion lasted some time, and it was amusing to see how angry all the women were with Griselda, as a traitor to her sex, while the men were disposed to look upon her with pitying admiration, although some of them were compelled to own that the husband's methods were somewhat barbarous.

While dainty food and cooling drinks were handed round, I ventured to ask a lady near me, why the Lord Lodovico was not present at this delightful gathering. She explained to me that now, when at last the day was actually fixed for his wedding with the Princess Beatrice d' Este, to whom he has been so long betrothed, the Duke of Bari feared to give too much offence to the parents of Beatrice, the Duke and Duchess of Ferrara, if he con-

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tinued to be seen in public with his mistress. In fact, he is compelled to sacrifice his affection for Cecilia to his interest.

[Cipher] I must own, Agnese, that I look upon that wedding with great anxiety and alarm. We know Beatrice so well, seeing that for eight years of her early childhood she was with us at Naples, and you will remember how bright and clever she was, but, above all, how wilful and determined. She always insisted upon being first in everything, and, unfortunately, she always got her own way. What will it be when she comes to Milan as the wife of Signor Lodovico, who is practically Duke of Milan? He makes all the laws, gives all the appointments to his own friends, has the money coined with his image, and is the real master of all. What will it be if this young Beatrice, who is four years younger than her cousin Isabella, my Duchess, should also insist upon taking the first place and being the real mistress? As the matter stands at present, the wedding is fixed to take place in May of next year, 1490; and even the marriage contract has been signed, for it seems that Lodovico dare not affront the other rulers of Italy by delaying much longer this alliance, arranged as far back as 1480. Still, one never knows what may happen. Nothing is certain but the accomplished fact. Besides, Beatrice may have changed and improved under the wise influence of her mother, the good Duchess Leonora; and, in any case, it is no use going halfway to meet trouble.

To you, dear Agnese, I offer once more my enduring love.

Your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER VII

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,

This 7th day of August, 1490.

AL NOME DI DIO.

You tell me, my Agnese, that it is so long since you heard from me, and I greatly fear that some disaster must have befallen my last messenger. There are so many perils by land and sea, that indeed I am truly thankful when a letter from you reaches me in safety. As I read your precious words, this day received, I seem to feel myself transported into your peaceful chamber, and I see you amongst your birds and flowers, and for the moment forget all the turmoil and restless anxieties of this great Court.

In my last letter I told you about our winter entertainments here, of which the most interesting was the splendid wedding in the chapel of the Castello, of Count Galeazzo San Severino with that lovely young Bianca, the illegitimate child of Signor Lodovico, to whom he is devotedly attached. This is one of those frequent "marriages for the future," as the little girl is to continue her education for the next five years. Bianca is quite charming. . . . I often wonder why a child who should never have been born, so often asserts the right to a place in this world by surpassing beauty or merit. The ways of Providence are wonderful, and you, my saint, who know more of them than I do, may be able



Titian.

ISABELLA D' ESTE, MARCHETA OF MANTUA.

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to tell me that these gifts are granted, in compensation, to some vagrant soul which has strayed from Paradise and lost its way

The bestowal of his daughter in marriage is only one amid countless proofs of Count Galeazzo's high favour with the Duke of Bari, who has also given him great estates, a palace in Milan, and a delightful villa here at Pavia, near the Convent of San Francesco. But now I must tell you about another marriage, in which we have all taken the greatest interest. You must remember, long ago, the coming to Naples of the Duchess Leonora for her father the King's second marriage, when she brought her eldest daughter, Isabella. This Princess, the sister of Beatrice, was married last February (1490) to the young Marquess Francesco Gonzaga, of Mantua. My Duchess has received full particulars of the event from her aunt, the bride's mother, and you will be interested to hear that Isabella is considered to have made an excellent match. Her young husband is devoted to her, and made the most splendid preparations for her reception in the beautiful and cultured city of Mantua. He had actually borrowed from Urbino those world-famed tapestries of the Trojan War, and the presents which the bride received were worthy of an Empress. I am told that Isabella has grown up a brilliant and accomplished lady, and I dare say we shall often see her here at the Court, if the Lord Lodovico's marriage with her sister Beatrice ever takes place. I told you it had been put off again, and we gather from the letter of the Duchess Leonora that her parents are seriously anxious about the matter.

However, I fancy the successful accomplishment of Isabella's wedding may have had something to do with

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Duke Lodovico's recent decision to send Francesco da Casate as envoy to Ferrara, with a splendid offering to his betrothed bride : a necklace of priceless pearls, set in gold, with a most costly pendant of pearls, emeralds, and rubies. At the same time the Duke will make humble apologies for his delay, and positively settle his wedding as soon as the Ferrara Princes can arrange it.

But if this marriage really seems in immediate prospect, another which concerns us nearly has been most unfortunately broken off. I have mentioned more than once that the Lady Bianca Maria, sister of our young Duke, has been betrothed for several years to a most cultivated and excellent young Prince, the son of the great Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary. We were always hearing what a liberal patron he was of the Arts and of Learning. Amongst his other treasures of books and manuscripts, he was the fortunate owner of a rare manuscript by Festus Pompeius, of which he caused a perfect copy to be made for Duke Lodovico, who, in return, promised his father a beautiful painting of the Holy Family by Leonardo da Vinci. The Prince of Hungary was also a good musician, and had caused the famous Lorenzo da Pavia to build for him an exquisite organ. But, alas ! joy comes to some and disaster to others. The King Matthias is recently dead, the people have rebelled, and deprived the young Prince of his throne, so he is no longer a fit bridegroom for the Princess Bianca. It is sad indeed for him to lose his bride as well as his kingdom.

Poor Bianca ! this is her second disappointment, for once before all her hopes were dashed to the ground by the death of the young Prince of Savoy, to whom she was first betrothed. She is very silent and depressed, but

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my Duchess has been most kind and tender to her, for the poor girl is much more loveable in her sorrow than in her proud triumph. As for Bianca's mother, the Duchess Bona, she gives way to loud and foolish lamentations when anyone will listen, and seems to think that Fate and Providence and the whole world have cruelly combined to prevent her daughter's marriage. She is so unwise and vehement in her complaints on every subject, that she does more harm than good to those she loves and is, indeed, their worst enemy. She is really, I believe, passionately fond of her son, Duke Gian Galeazzo, but she has no influence whatever upon his actions, and is constantly quarrelling with him. My Duchess is most gentle and patient with the poor lady, and can often soothe her when others fail. Duke Lodovico treats his sister-in-law with great honour and courtesy, for now that his marriage appears to be definitely settled, he is anxious that she should not return to her sister Charlotte at the French Court, but remain to receive his future wife, and add to the stateliness of his wedding.

Meantime there is a kind of armed truce between them, and we must all make the most of this fairly peaceful time. My Duchess feels it her duty to accompany her husband as much as possible in all the outdoor sports in which they both delight, but which to him are the sole object of life. For the present the Lady Isabella seems to accept this fact, and she scarcely makes any effort to induce him to interest himself in affairs of State and Government. No doubt she trusts that by her sweet complaisance she may in time gain influence over his weaker character. The exquisite gardens here have been a great delight to her all the summer ; there is so

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much pleasant shade, such fountains and running water, that we never feel the heat too much. Did I tell you that there is a small Hospital not far from us here, in which all that knowledge and care can do for the sick and injured is done ? and I have the pleasure of visiting it almost every day, in company with my Duchess, who spends some of the happiest hours of her life in carrying hope and comfort to those poor afflicted sufferers. There is one chamber set apart in this house of mercy for the young children, and I must own that this is the place where we linger by choice. The little ones are so easily pleased, and are so quick to show their gratitude. Yesterday we took a small green parrot—the image of your pet “Bella Donna”—who has learnt to say a few short sentences, and you cannot conceive the children’s delight when my Duchess told them the bird had come to live with them.

And now, dear Agnese, I must tell you the most wonderful piece of news, which I have saved with great difficulty for the end of my letter. Shall I leave you to guess it ? Shall I bid you imagine the most beautiful thing, full of golden hope and promise—a marvel which happens every day upon this earth, and yet can never lose its strange, mysterious charm ?

Has a rumour of that coming event already reached your ears ? I think not ; but I will no longer keep you waiting. Yes, Agnese, at length we are gladdened by the pleasing, anxious expectation that our dear Duchess may, by the blessing of God, become a happy mother next December. We can think of nothing else, and yet we can scarcely dare to speak of that hope which has so much of fear and anxiety mingled with it. If, as we trust and desire, a son should be born to her, think of the difference it must make to her position to be mother of the

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heir, the future Duke of Milan? The Duchess Bona is, of course, in a wild state of delight, and it is all that we can do to prevent her constantly watching over and worrying her daughter-in-law to be careful of her health.

For my part, I encourage my Duchess to continue all her usual pursuits, and think as little as possible about the future. She still carries on her delightful literary and musical evenings, when we have improvisations on the lute, and singing, which you would enjoy above all things. A new musician has recently settled in Pavia—Maestro Franchino Gaffuri, a native of Lodi—who discourses most delicious music on the viol, and also of a more serious tone on the organ. Sometimes we read a Canto from the “Paradiso” of Dante, and discuss it together afterwards, or Matteo Bandello will recite to us some pleasant story. The poet Bellincione is always ready to delight us with one of his sonnets, and when Leonardo da Vinci joins our company, he is so eloquent and brilliant that the success of the meeting is assured. One day last week we had a friendly dispute as to whether Dante or Petrarch were the greater poet, and I was chosen by my Duchess to support the side of Dante, of whose works she is a devoted admirer. You will ask how I acquitted myself, and at least I may truly say that my dear Lady kindly expressed her full satisfaction.

Never do I miss you so much, my Agnese, as at these meetings, and in all I say then I always seem to long for your guiding soul. The least I can do is to give you any poetical works which are specially interesting. With this letter I send you a copy presented to me of Poliziano’s “Orfeo,” which he wrote in three days, and which was first performed in Mantua in 1472. I have heard a delightful story about the first appearance

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of Poliziano's "Miscellanea" in Milan. Jacopo Antiquario, the Duke's secretary, went to his office one morning, and found all his clerks neglecting their proper business to read the sheets of a book just published. Jacopo asked what it was, and when he heard it was by Poliziano, he sent for another copy from the stall of the bookseller in the street near, and he too sat down and began to read, forgetting everything else.

I can only hope that you will find the "Orfeo" as absorbing and delightful. When you write to me, Agnese, tell me everything about my dear home, all the little things which pass from day to day, and which are so familiar that you may think them hardly worth writing. I read your dear letters again and again, and look upon them as my richest treasure. Think of us often, my dear sister, and remember us in your prayers, for, indeed, we have need of help from above.

Your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER VIII

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 31st day of December, 1490.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE, MY BELOVED,

Rejoice with me and take part in our song of thanksgiving. After our long vigil of watching and anxiety, the clouds and darkness have passed away, for our hopes are fulfilled, and joy reigns supreme. To my dear Duchess has been given her heart's desire, and a son is born to her. Here is the great event which has made this a red-letter day, and no words of mine can add to its unique importance. The joy-bells are ringing in every church and abbey of the State, and processions of thanksgiving are held in each town and village. Splendid gifts for the mother and child are constantly arriving from the great nobles, ambassadors, and chief officials of Milan, and our rooms are gaily decorated to receive a deputation of noble ladies, with their presents and congratulations.

The Count of Pavia—for it is to this dignity that the infant Prince is born—is to receive the name of Francesco, from his great ancestor, the founder of all the Sforza greatness. The young Duke Gian Galeazzo is wild with pride and delight, and can scarcely believe in his own good fortune. The triumphant words “my son” are ever on his lips, and no form of flattery and adulation is too strong to please him. If possible, the Duchess Bona is

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still more excited, and she seems to think that this auspicious event has settled the destinies of Milan for ever. But we are not troubled by these extravagances, for as we look upon our dear Duchess, so peaceful and happy in her contented motherhood, we have no thoughts to spare for anyone else. I seem to hear you asking so many questions, my Agnese, and I will do my best to make reply; and as to the precious babe himself, I cannot do better than quote the words of dear old Anna, who nursed the Lady Isabella herself, and has reached the summit of her ambition now that she has supreme possession of the infant heir.

“Tell the Signora Agnese that the Count of Pavia is not one of those great strong babies you may find in any hovel; but he is a perfect little picture, with just one of the angel faces which you see in an altarpiece above Our Lady. If I could name a fault, it is that he is too good and never cries enough.”

It is quite true that the little features are marvellous in their perfection, for he is a small replica of his lovely mother. You will not think me foolish to dwell so much upon the coming of a little child, as you will understand all that this means to my Duchess. . . .

We have just had a visit from the Duke Lodovico, who came accompanied by the Court astrologer, Maestro Ambrogio da Rosate. The Duke was most friendly in his congratulations, although they struck my prejudiced ear as somewhat formal; and he made the hesitating remark that the child looked small and delicate, which was unlike his usual tact. I have already told you how absolutely the Duke believes in astrology; he never does anything without consulting Ambrogio, and now he has come to offer, as a special favour, that the horoscope of

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the infant Prince shall be cast. We really had no voice in the matter, for his nephew, the Duke Gian Galeazzo, was enchanted at the suggestion, and we are to be told the result to-morrow, or as soon as the Court astrologer is ready. Messire Ambrogio inquired the exact hour and minute of birth and a few other matters, looked very wise, and took his leave. As I escorted Signor Lodovico to the threshold, after a time, he asked me to give him the honour of a few words in private. I think I must have won his favour in some way—perhaps he considers me the most serious and reasonable person in attendance on the Duchess of Milan. Will you think it curious, Agnese, if I tell you that many people have a way of confiding in me? Do you fancy it is on account of my gift of seeing both sides of a question? For me, in fact, the villain is never so black as he is painted, as I can always understand motives, and see lighter shades and alleviations.

I leave you to apply this remark. When we were seated in the small antechamber, the Duke Lodovico watched me for a moment with his piercing eyes, which gleamed from below the bushy eyebrows, while I noticed a thoughtful expression on the low, broad forehead half hidden by the long black hair. “Signora Violante,” he began at last, “I have heard much of you from a dear friend of mine . . . whom I no longer see at present, and who has given up her suite of rooms in this Castello.” He paused for a moment, and I simply bowed my assent, for I well knew that he referred to the Lady Cecilia, and there was a tone in his voice which appealed to my sympathy.

“Will you do me a kindness, Signora? You know that my wedding is fixed for January 16, in the Castello

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of Pavia, and I am very anxious to learn if you think the Duchess Isabella will have recovered enough to receive my bride, as she enters Milan in state procession on Sunday, January 22. This is really a very important matter, as I am so extremely anxious that my wife Beatrice and her cousin Isabella should be on the most intimate terms of friendship."

"Indeed, my lord," I replied eagerly, "I have every reason to hope that my Duchess will be quite well enough to mount a horse by that time. And, moreover, I may assure you that nothing will give her greater pleasure than to show all affection and the warmest welcome to the dear cousin who lived with us at Naples for almost eight years, and was like a younger sister to her."

"Was it so many years?" he asked musingly. "Nearly half her life, for my young bride is not yet sixteen. If you can spare me time, Signora, I should like to show you the rooms prepared for the Lady Beatrice in the Rocca, and perhaps you may be able to suggest something which would add to her pleasure or comfort."

Of course, I agreed with ready interest. I had already seen some of the preparations, and had heard much about them, but I was certainly not prepared for the magnificent scale on which everything was being carried out. Although the work had been going on for months, the splendid chambers were still crowded with skilled artists, workers in precious metal, and others, and never have I seen anything to equal the beauty and charm of those gay decorations, which turned a gloomy Castello into a palace of art and beauty. In the Salla della Palla, on the first floor, we were fortunate enough to meet the great artist Leonardo, who was giving his directions there. The high vaulted ceiling of this princely hall was painted to

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imitate the blue sky sprinkled with golden stars, while round the walls there were hung pictures to celebrate the gallant deeds of Francesco Sforza, the father of Duke Lodovico, who married the heiress of the Visconti. In the doorway of this hall, which was to be used as the ballroom, was a triumphal arch, under which the great Condottiere rode his war charger, so that there was no chance of his being forgotten. When I had seen and sufficiently admired everything, the Duke asked me to look at a treasure he had lately obtained—a bust of Beatrice d' Este, specially sculptured for him by Cristoforo Romano, a most charming portrait of the young girl, looking much as I remembered her, with her curling hair, round cheeks, full lips, and slightly turned-up nose, which gave an air of gay waywardness. The two outstretched hands were holding a veil with pretty quaintness. This was the last and most precious thing he showed me, for he was called away to decide some important matter of the preparations in the city.

As I hastened back to my mistress, I wondered whether there might not have been a deeper meaning in his anxiety to win my sympathy. Was it possible that he wished to gain my friendship for his radiant, triumphant young bride? Surely she would be placed so high that she would never lack a friend!

As the days passed on, and we heard nothing more about the horoscope which Maestro Ambrogio had promised, I could see that my Duchess was growing anxious. I made several attempts to find out the reason of the delay, but was always put off with some excuse, until one day I found the young mother in tears, with the boy in her arms. "Violante, I know what it is!" she exclaimed. "Ambrogio has seen some-

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thing so terrible in the stars that he dare not let me know."

In my inmost heart I thought this very likely, for the astrologer was bound to please his master, the Duke Lodovico, and good fortune foretold to this infant heir would mean disaster to the real master of Milan. But I remembered our ill-fated journey from Naples, and I had no belief in the prophecies of Maestro Ambrogio. Then a thought occurred to me. I recalled an amusing story of Franco Sacchetti, and knowing well that my Duchess is guided by reason rather than impulse, and that she is not a slave to superstition, I asked if I might read it to her. She is always ready to listen to me, so this is what she heard :

"The astrologer Fazio of Pisa was once at Genoa, in company with a number of wise men who had come from all parts. He began to boast that he could read all secrets in the stars, and he offered to tell each of his companions what day they would reach their home. Then Sacchetti stood up and asked Fazio if he knew the past as well as the future. 'Surely, much better,' he replied. 'Then tell me what you were doing on this day last year? Where were you two months ago at this hour? What ship arrived last in this port and which one has left? . . .' The astrologer was quite puzzled, and could only reply: 'You have too many syllogisms in your head.' 'Nonsense! I only ask you simple and natural things. Let me see. Have you ever eaten medlars?' 'Thousands of times,' replied the man of Pisa. 'Well, then, tell me, how many pips are there in a medlar?' 'I do not know.' 'If you do not know about these little matters, how can you possibly pretend to the knowledge of heavenly secrets, of the

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past and the future? Oh, you astrologers, what fools you are! You roll your eyes upwards, you stay at night on the roof, like the cats, and by dint of staring at the sky you lose sight of the earth! *Poveri in canna!*''

I truly believe this made an impression upon my Duchess, for you know what a keen sense of humour she has. In any case, we spoke no more about the casting of that nativity, but my curiosity was roused, and a friend who saw it, repeated this from memory: "Mercury, being lord of the ascendant, irradiated by a malefic quartile aspect of the planet Mars, and afflicted by an opposition with Jupiter, declares that the native* shall be involved in an abyss of troubles and afflictions, even to the hazard of his life. . . ." You can make what you like of it, Agnese.

To turn from the stars to this poor earth, I must tell you that we are having the most terrible winter I ever knew. It is impossible to keep warm in these great draughty rooms, where, even with a roaring wood fire, we shiver from cold a few yards away from the hearth. I do envy you, dear, in your balmy South, where the wintry wind has not this icy, piercing quality, and the frost never lasts in Naples as it does here. All the country round is white as far as we can see, and the snow, which began on Christmas Day, is now three feet deep in the streets. I have delayed this letter a few days, as there is so much to tell you, but the messenger leaves to-morrow, Sunday, the first day of the New Year, for which I send you all my dearest wishes. I hear that the wedding party was to set forth from Ferrara on Thursday last, so that all those great ladies—the Duchess Leonora of Ferrara and her daughters, Isabella, Marchesa of Mantua,

* The person born, whose horoscope is cast.

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and the bride, Beatrice—will, I fear, have a terrible journey, for the River Po is frozen in the upper reaches.

It is Duchess Bona who tells me all the news. She is in the highest spirits in the immediate prospect of the marriage of her daughter Anna, and the delightful occupation of buying a magnificent trousseau. The bridegroom, young Prince Alfonso, is actually on his way here, with his mother and his two sisters. Anna's dowry as a Princess of Milan is fixed at one hundred thousand golden crowns, more than twice as much as that paid with Duke Lodovico's bride, Beatrice. You will marvel at this large sum, and also at the immense expenditure of every kind, in decorating the Castello and in the costly preparations for the wedding. But you must remember that the State of Milan has twice the income of the whole kingdom of Naples—about six or seven hundred thousand ducats. I believe the taxation is very heavy. But now I must hasten to end this long letter, and I will write to you again directly after the wedding has taken place.

Ever your most loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER IX

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 2nd day of February, 1491.

AL NOME DI DIO.

CARISSIMA,

Where shall I begin the story of this all-important wedding, the great event which has just taken place; and how can I make you fully realize its splendour and magnificence? I will approach it by degrees, and first describe to you the bride's journey hither, which, as I foretold, was a most wretched and painful experience, almost worse than our coming from Naples with my Duchess. Why is it that the winter is always chosen for these expeditions, which seems to me a tempting of Providence?

In warm, genial weather, the journey by water from Ferrara to Pavia is a delightful holiday excursion; but now the Po is frozen for nearly half the distance, and the unfortunate ladies of the party had to travel for two days in rough country carts as far as the little town of Brescello, nearly seventy miles from Ferrara. Here the river was navigable with some difficulty, and they were met by three stately barges and other smaller boats, one of which seems to have contained most of the provisions, and through mischance was delayed by rough weather. Imagine the condition of those poor Princesses, who had no dinner, and actually wept for cold and hunger, while they could not sleep for the tossing of their

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pompous Bucentaur ! Not till they reached Piacenza, on January 12, did they get warm and comfortable, and have a really good meal.

After a day's rest, the company continued their journey by river, and reached Pavia on Sunday, January 15, at half-past four in the afternoon. Here they were met with great state by the Duke Lodovico and a splendid escort of nobles and gentlemen from Milan. It must have needed quite an heroic effort on the part of the bride and her relations to look smiling and happy after all they had endured. They were so late in arriving, that it was all they could do to make ready for the wedding ceremony, which had been fixed by the Court astrologer for January 17.

The lady-in-waiting who told me all the story of the journey said that when she landed from the state barge, and had to ride in procession across the covered bridge and through the streets of Pavia, amid the shouts of the populace, she almost fell asleep and dropped from utter weariness. Her only desire in life was for a comfortable bed and a long rest, and she was quite sure the bride, her mistress, felt the same. But now their troubles and hardships were at an end, for in the Castello of Pavia all was luxury and magnificence.

I should like to have seen that first meeting between Signor Lodovico and his bride, Beatrice, the young girl of fifteen whom I had known so well. They tell me that this mature man of nearly forty, with intimate experience of many fair women, was greatly interested and charmed by the fresh brightness and absolute fearlessness of the sparkling, dark-eyed Princess of Ferrara. I can quite understand that to the Duke, accustomed to reverence and almost timidity from all he met, this laughing, out-

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spoken air of comradeship was most fascinating in a pretty child. Very ambitious and clever far beyond her years, Beatrice appears to have taken his measure at once, and to have known almost by instinct how to attract her imposing and strikingly handsome bridegroom. His courteous manners and wide intelligence soon won golden opinions for him with the cultivated Duchess Leonora and, above all, with the brilliant Isabella, Marchesa of Mantua, who always gives one the idea of being so much older than her sister Beatrice, although there is but a year between them.

I can describe the actual wedding from hearsay alone. It took place in the old chapel of the Visconti, belonging to the Castello of Pavia, with only a select few of the relations and courtiers, for most of the Court, with our Duke and Duchess of Milan at their head, were to welcome the bridal party in Milan itself. The next day, Wednesday, Duke Lodovico came here to make sure that all was ready for the final reception, and invitations were sent to all the great nobles of State and foreign Princes to join in a magnificent tournament, to be held for three days in Milan before the end of the month.

On Sunday morning, January 22, all we ladies of the household set forth in the train of my Duchess, who was gorgeously clad in crimson velvet, with a warm ermine mantle, and we rode out through a snowy world as far as the city gate towards the Ticino, by the old Gothic Church of San Estorgio, where the bones of the Miga were formerly preserved. There was a bitter cold wind, and I was very thankful, for the sake of my Lady, that we had not long to wait before we saw the stately procession drawing near, to the martial sound of trumpets and clarions. All the company, and the horses especially,

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looked very fresh and in splendid condition, for they had only had a short journey of about eighteen miles from Binasco, where they had spent the night in the ancient Castello of the Visconti. When the royal ladies of Ferrara rode up in their magnificent costumes, they were welcomed by the Duchess of Milan, whom they greeted with every mark of affection. The Duchess Leonora paused to inquire of her niece, with loving eagerness, about her infant son. But there was not much time for private talk, as we were only a little in advance of the great procession waiting at the Porta Ticinese, headed by the Duke of Milan and his uncle the Duke of Bari, in a gorgeous mantle of gold brocade.

At the gateway, the two processions formed into one to enter the city, and the order of precedence was arranged by the Court marshals. I must mention here a small incident which really had a deep and significant meaning. The Duchess of Milan, as the first lady in the State, was given her place before the bride, who coloured up, bit her lip, and for one moment looked as though she were going to insist on riding in front of her cousin. She was checked by a whispered word from her mother, but a threatening frown remained upon the young girl's face until it was dispersed by the thundering shouts from the populace of "Moro, Moro!" which proved indeed, as I have often noticed, that Duke Lodovico is the central figure in the eye of the world.

I wish I could give you any idea of the wonderful decorations which covered the houses and balconies on the line of route. In one street, that of the armourers, figures of knights in armour on horseback stood all along the front of the shops, and at first we thought they were alive. The enthusiasm reached its height when we



Photo, Brogi.

After Titian by Dosso Dossi.

ALFONSO I. D' ESTE, DUKE OF FERRARA.

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rode into the vast piazza before the Castello, where the young bride was received with great state by the Duchess Bona and her two daughters, Bianca Maria and Anna, whose own wedding was to take place privately on the morrow, although the most imposing and final ceremony will be when she arrives at Ferrara.

We shall miss her very much, for she is a great friend of my Duchess, and is quite devoted to her baby nephew. Dear Anna ! I hope she will be very happy, and have children of her own to love, for she is so gentle and tender that she will make a perfect mother.

This last week, we have had a most dazzling succession of jousts, banquets, and feasts of every kind. They began the day after the marriage of Alfonso d' Este, heir to the Duchy of Ferrara, a tall youth of fifteen, and Anna Sforza. On the 24th, there was a gorgeous ceremony to present gold and silver plate from Milan and the State to the Duke and Duchess of Bari, in which I trust that the Lady Beatrice had her fill of homage and adulation ! A great ball was given the same evening to about two hundred of the chief ladies of Milan, in the Sala della Palla of the Castello. Two days later we had the magnificent giostra, when all the knights who took part in the tournament, wore gorgeous fancy dress and amazing devices and symbols. The knights of Mantua formed a company of twenty men on horseback, dressed in sylvan fashion : green velvet, with olive branches on their heads and golden lances in their hands ; Alfonso Gonzaga was their leader. The Bologna knights followed, with Annibale Bentivoglio, who had married Lucrezia d' Este, and in honour of her badge, they rode in a car of triumph drawn by unicorns and stags. Then came a strange band of twelve knights, led by Gaspare San Severino,

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who all had Duke Lodovico's device of a Moor's head on their helmets, wore black and gold Moorish costume, and white doves were painted on their black armour.

But the most striking of all was a troop of Scythians, on superb Barbary horses, who rode at full speed across the lists, and then, as they turned to face the bridal party, cast off this disguise and stood forth in gorgeous costume, with the famous Galeazzo di San Severino as their captain. He struck his golden lance in the earth, and immediately a gigantic Moor came forward and repeated a sonnet in praise of the bride, Beatrice Duchess of Bari. We were told that these Scythian costumes had been specially designed by the famous master Leonardo da Vinci.

All this was only a kind of pageant to introduce the tournament, which lasted for three days, and as I gave you such a full account of the one we had at Pavia in honour of the wedding of my Duchess, I will only tell you that this one was ten times more magnificent. It was our Count Galeazzo who distinguished himself above all the other nobles even the Marquis of Mantua, Annibale Bentivoglio, and a splendid personage who came to Milan in the train of Beatrice d' Este—I mean Niccolò da Correggio, who looked very superb in gold brocade. The prize, a length of cloth of gold, was bestowed by the bride on Count Galeazzo, who wore a stately costume designed by Leonardo. After the three days' tilting, the wedding festivities came to an end with a great sumptuous banquet, and yesterday, February 1, we took leave of the Duchess of Ferrara, her brilliant daughter Isabella d' Este, and our own dear Princess Anna, who returns with them to Ferrara for another series of festivities in honour of her own wedding. They are all to visit the

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Certosa of Pavia on the way back, and to be entertained by the Prior and monks.

Now that our guests have departed, I must try to give you some idea of the impression the ladies made upon me. Duchess Leonora was deeply attached to the mother of my dear mistress (Ippolita Sforza), and she was most kind to her. But I could not help noticing that the Marchesa Isabella, for all her show of courtesy, treated my Duchess with a patronizing air, which much annoyed me when I remembered that the Duchess of Milan is not only several years older, but has a far more distinguished position. Do not think me wanting in charity, Agnese, but everything which affects my Duchess is of such supreme importance to me, that I seem to have a kind of warning instinct. Wherever these two sisters were present, with their sparkling talk and superb self-confidence, my Duchess, who in intellect is certainly superior to them, was cast into the shade. Perhaps, when the Marchesa of Mantua is no longer here, she may be able to hold her own with only Beatrice the bride, whose great attraction for everyone lies chiefly in her marvellous flow of animal spirits. Her merry laugh about the most trivial matter seems to be quite infectious, and I certainly never saw either her husband, Lodovico, or our young Duke of Milan, so amused and delighted as they seem to be at the young lady's bold sallies of fun. It is really this constant excited merriment which seems to bring all the men to her feet.

I fancy her mother was a little anxious on this score, for she put her somewhat in the care of a much older cousin of hers, as lady-in-waiting, Pollissena d' Este, who watches Beatrice constantly, and occasionally ventures to put in a restraining word. This Lady Pollissena is

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very friendly with me, and I think would like to win my confidence ; but we are both of us perfect models of discretion, and have the same object—to keep the peace between the two noble ladies we serve, so closely akin as cousins and yet in such dangerous rivalry with each other.

Remember us ever in your prayers, my Agnese, for indeed we have need of them in these days of anxious foreboding. And with most fond love I sign myself,

Your devoted sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER X

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 28th day of March, 1491.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE, MY BELOVED,

Your letter was a great joy to me, and I thank you from my heart for your wise advice, "not to meet trouble halfway." Yes, you are right, "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof"; and as if in proof of its truth, I am writing to you to-day in the best of spirits. We have now settled down after all the excitement of the wedding, and I think this last month has been for my Duchess, perhaps the happiest time she has enjoyed since she left Naples. In the first place, she is such a devoted mother that her little son is a constant surprise and joy to her: every change and passing expression and dawning gleam of intelligence on the baby face, is like a peep into heaven for her, and she spends each hour that she can spare from her social duties, in her loving watch.

The young Duchess of Bari has been to see the infant Count of Pavia, and vows that she adores babies. . . . Indeed, I think that the sight of the mother and child together, brought an unwonted look of tenderness into her bright, saucy face, with its careless claim for dominion and admiration. At this moment she is the idol of the gay Court of Milan: every wish is gratified as soon as expressed; her life is one unceasing, radiant holiday, and

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she must indeed be hard to please if she is not perfectly happy, and therefore good-tempered. I have never known Duke Gian Galeazzo so cheerful and anxious to please as when his young "Aunt Beatrice" is present; and he will even appear at his wife's receptions when the Duchess of Bari is likely to join them, and show some interest in our literary conversations. One evening, about three weeks after her wedding, Signora Beatrice gave us an amusing account of a day's excursion she had taken to Cussago, a delightful villa on the Brianza, about six miles from Milan, where she and her ladies had ridden over in the charge of the courtly Galeazzo San Severino, the son-in-law of Lodovico, who sent him as deputy, to entertain the young wife when he was engaged.

My Duchess had reluctantly declined to join the day's sport, as she is not yet very strong, and had been overtired with the wedding festivities. "We had a very merry time, Isabella, and you missed a rare treat," said the Duchess of Bari. "We set forth at ten o'clock, with Messer Galeazzo and all my ladies, and Dioda, my jester, made us good sport on the way. You should have heard us all sing together as we rode! He took the tenor and I sang soprano, and our cavaliers joined in with deep bass notes till the woods echoed with our mirth. When we reached Cussago, I settled that we would go fishing, and you would not believe what a quantity of fish we caught: trout, pike, crabs, and lampreys which were best of all, as we found out at dinner, when they were cooked for us. After that we played ball till we were tired, then we looked at the fish laid out in rows on the grass, and picked out the best for presents, throwing the rest back in the water."

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‘What a successful day you must have had, Beatrice!’ said my Duchess, with a smile.

“But I have not told you the half yet,” was the prompt rejoinder. “Next we mounted our horses, and Messer Galeazzo let fly some of his falcons along the river-side, and they killed some herons and water-fowl. It was four o’clock when we were tired of hawking, and I thought there would be time for a little hunting, so we started a number of stags and fawns, and chased two of each, which we killed before it was too dark. Then we rode home through the dusk to Milan, and presented our spoils to my Lord Lodovico, who was greatly amazed and delighted, and listened to my story with the greatest possible pleasure. He promises me that I shall hunt every day, if I like,” she added, with sparkling eyes and an air of triumph.

We all joined in a chorus of praise and congratulation, in which the young Duke of Milan was loudest of all. He declares that he will never miss a hunting-party again if he can help it. My Duchess and, I may add, all the household are most grateful to the lively young Princess who can thus interest and amuse him.

As the Lady Beatrice was taking leave that evening she exclaimed: “That villa at Cussago, with its beautiful carved marble and its lovely situation, quite haunts me, and I should love to have it for my very own.” There was a tone of assurance about the eager words which foretold what would happen . . . for is any wish of that favoured bride ever left unfulfilled?

One afternoon, about a week later, our gathering was in the splendid *sala* of Duchess Beatrice, in the Rocchetta portion of the Castello. We were specially invited to admire a very curious manuscript copy of “Le Chant de Roland” which Lodovico had presented to his bride.

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Amongst our company was the poet and courtier Galeaz Visconti, who once more started a discussion which had much entertained the wedding guests, concerning the "Orlando Innamorato" of Messer Matteo Boiardo, of Ferrara. The Marchesa Isabella of Mantua had eagerly contended that Rinaldo was a nobler paladin than Orlando, but her sister Beatrice and Messer Galeaz were both on the side of the famous nephew of Charlemagne, that peerless knight, who sounded his horn in the fatal Pass of Roncesvalles, and there fell by a tragic and heroic death, which has moved to tears all feeling hearts for so many generations. It happened most fortunately that my Duchess and I had carefully studied all that is written of that delightful poem, and we were quite able to defend our hero Orlando in the discussion which followed. You would have been charmed to hear the brightness and learning with which my dear Duchess pointed out that Rinaldo might be a brave cavalier, but that Orlando was far more than this, being a hero faithful to the death, and most worthy to take his place in Paradise with the Saints, having served his God with the same fervent zeal as he had served his master.

The Lady Beatrice spoke pleasantly and well, but I think she was a little doubtful in her own mind as to which she preferred. It was the faithful admirer of Isabella of Mantua who, on her behalf, manfully fought the battle on the side of Rinaldo, while he confessed that he was but a poor champion in the place of the absent lady. You would greatly enjoy all the poem, or rather romance, which Messer Boiardo has already written, and my Duchess has promised me to send you the manuscript of the two first cantos. In my own mind I cannot help thinking that the poet has been

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somewhat too much influenced by the English legends of King Arthur and the Table Round, for he brings Orlando into so many strange love affairs that we scarcely recognize the heroic paladin of Roncesvalles, and see in him another Tristram or a Lancelot of the Lake. But this is how Boiardo explains his theory; I quote from the first canto.

“ Do not, my lord, think it marvellous to hear tell of Orlando as a lover, for whoso in the world is most haughty is by Love vanquished and entirely subdued. Neither the strong arm nor the gallant courage, nor shield or mail, nor sharp sword, can ever make a defence which, in the end, will not be defeated and taken by Love ” (Canto I. i. 2).

And again, when the poet refers to King Arthur of Britain :

“ At one time Britain the great was glorious for arms and for love, whence still to-day its name resounds so that to King Arthur it brings honour, when the good knights of that company show forth in many battles their valour ; going with their ladies on adventures, so that their fame endures to our time. . . . The gallant love which to their noble ladies the knights bore in the ancient time, and the battles and the strange adventures, and the combats in jousts and tourneys, cause its name to endure in the world, so that we all listen to it gladly ; and one hearer honours one knight the more, and another honours the other most, as if they were still living amongst us.”

How do you like this, my Agnese ? I will not write out any more, as I hope soon to send you the delightful poem itself, and then you must give me your opinion about all the marvellous romantic adventures

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of the brave Orlando. For my own part, I love him best as the heroic paladin rather than as the passionate lover. I quite long to make a pilgrimage to that Pass of Roncesvalles, and to see the great gap in the mountain which the dying Orlando made with his wonderful sword. I scarcely wonder at the story Poggio tells of a good burgher of Milan who, after hearing a wandering singer describe the tragic story of Orlando's death, went home in tears, and could hardly be consoled for a disaster which befell so many hundred years ago.

Such subjects of literary interest as these may form a passing diversion for our gay young Duchess of Bari, but her real delight is entirely in outdoor sports. Before the end of February she had persuaded the Lord Lodovico to take her to Vigevano where, as you know, the finest hunting is to be had, more especially as for some time past he has been assiduously stocking the great park there with big game. To make it more lively and joyous, all the Court moved to the Castello there, and my Duchess was only too eager to accompany her husband, who was extremely keen to join in the sport. I think the precious babe might have been better at Milan, which is warmer, but the Lady Beatrice insisted that he must come too, and not be parted from his mother for a single day.

Agnese, I must own that since this coming of her cousin Beatrice, I have had many moments of anxious thought about my dear Duchess. A new spirit of fierce rivalry has entered into her, and now that she has quite regained her usual strength, nothing will serve but that she must follow the lead of Beatrice, even when that reckless young girl—five years younger than herself, in all the heyday of eager girlhood—makes the pace too

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fast and furious. You know what a fearless horsewoman the Lady Isabella is, but when the two Duchesses take to riding races together on their splendid horses, she of Bari is so wild and desperate and so determined to win that I, who can only lag behind, am in mortal terror for their lives. Besides this, Beatrice is a perfect madcap for all kinds of dangerous practical jokes. She will gallop furiously behind her most demure ladies-in-waiting, and give a sudden loud shout, for the fun of startling their horses. Only a week ago, poor Pollissena d' Este was frightened out of her wits, and actually thrown from her saddle, but her wild young cousin Beatrice only roared with laughter. She plays at ball in the great *sala* with all a child's eager delight, and dances every night until the courtiers and ladies are quite worn out.

No tame, peaceful hunting and hawking in the park, such as we have been accustomed to enjoy at Vigevano, will content the Duchess of Bari; she protests that the wolf and the wild boar are the only game she cares to chase. I must own that it was a great relief to me, when her husband carried her off to a charming country-house of his in the valley of the Ticino, the Villa Nova, where they would be in comparative solitude. I took my courage in both hands while she was away, and ventured to speak words of caution to my Duchess. The sweet lady silenced me with a kiss, and replied with wistful earnestness: "What else can I do, Violante? As I am placed, I must either swim with the tide or sink to the depths of despair. Can you not see that in this desperate rivalry with Beatrice, I must either prove myself her equal, or else entirely give up my position, and calmly consent to take the second place? So far it

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is a personal contest between myself and my cousin, and if I succeed in holding my own, I shall be able to help my husband in that yet more serious struggle which must come between him and his uncle. Remember this, Violante, when you see me act in a way which makes you anxious and troubled. Now forget all about it, and come with me to my darling Francesco."

I have told you everything, my Agnese, and you must draw your own conclusions. Write to me, dear, and give me counsel.

Farewell, dear sister, and I pray that all your desires be granted, in this world and in Paradise.

Your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XI

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,
This 15th day of June, 1491.

AL NOME DI DIO.

It seems to me, dear Agnese, that it is long since we have practised our childish cipher, and I will try my hand at it again, lest I should have forgotten the trick.

[In cipher.] You may think that many of my letters to you have been somewhat rash and, of course, this is true ; but, at the same time, all I have told you about the wild ways of Beatrice is common property. My story to-day has a more serious meaning, and also proves that, with all her frivolity, that lady has a serious and strong foundation to her character. For some time, she seems to have been in ignorance of her husband's intrigue with Cecilia, but when she found out that the lady was actually still living in the Castello of Milan (for that suite of rooms was never given up, after all), and that the Duke of Bari, who had been her devoted lover for nearly ten years, was still her constant visitor, Beatrice boldly asserted her rights. She refused to wear a wonderful garment of woven gold tissue, because she discovered that Lodovico had given a similar one to Cecilia ; and she spoke her mind to the ambassador from Ferrara, old Giacomo Trotti, with the result that there has been a disturbance, and the Duke of Bari has promised to dismiss the fair lady, and marry her to the complaisant

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Count Bergamini. To make matters worse, a child was born to Cecilia on May 3, a fine boy, who has received the name of Cesare, and who has been acknowledged by Lodovico as his son. The wedding with Bergamini is to take place next month, and the splendid Palazzo del Verme, near the Duomo, is to be one of the many wedding presents.

It is a wicked and incomprehensible world, my Agnese, but you must not think that I am hardened by Court life and speak lightly of evil things. I tell you this, that you may understand the determined courage and strength of character of this young Beatrice who rules us all. [End of cipher.] Since I last wrote to you we have had another long visit to Vigevano, and I will tell you about some wonderful wolf-hunts we had, in which the two Duchesses distinguished themselves more than anyone. On one occasion, after a long day, when they must have ridden more than thirty miles in chase of a wolf, the two ladies actually had the energy to stay behind and have a race. I must own that I was annoyed with my Duchess, and told her that I felt more pity for her tired horse than for herself. But their rivalry at times passes all bounds, for they have had lessons in wrestling, and only a week after that race, they had a sparring match together, and Beatrice, being the most active, knocked down my Lady Isabella, but fortunately she escaped with only a slight bruise.

I try to reason with her, but she only laughs at me until I could cry with vexation. Still, I confess that this horseplay in company has produced a more cordial feeling on the part of the young Duchess of Bari.

She was holding the little Count of Pavia in her arms one day, when Pollissena d' Este said to her: "Would you

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not love to have a little son of your very own?" But she only replied with a gay smile: "This one child is enough for me." I will own that I cannot understand her.

But I must tell you of another reckless adventure in which your wise and trusted sister actually took part. My Duchess came to me, and begged me to join her in a wild escapade which her cousin had planned. We were to dress up like women of the town, and several other ladies-in-waiting with us — by disguising ourselves with cloths over our heads and big market baskets—and thus to go through the streets and into the market to buy provisions. The rain came on heavily, yet this did not damp our leader's ardour; but you must know that it is not the custom here to wear this kind of drapery on the head, and as we passed, some countrywomen began to laugh at us and to say rude things. The young Duchess was not likely to put up with this, so she made indignant replies, and the result was that she nearly came to blows with those who had made fun of her. I quietly slipped some money into the hand of the noisiest, a big virago of a woman, and we managed to get away, and came home wet through, covered with mud. I do not know if Madama Beatrice enjoyed herself, but I can say most feelingly that none of us ladies found the expedition amusing. I am afraid you will begin to think that we ought to be in a Bethlehem hospital.*

You will ask what the Duke of Bari says to this conduct. His forbearance is amazing, as you will see from another adventure. He had been away for a few days at the Certosa da Pavia, giving orders about new choir-stalls in the beautiful church there, and as he

* From which the name "Bedlam" is derived.

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was returning, he was attacked and set upon by a party of roysterers. Happily he must have made a shrewd guess as to the meaning of this, for he divided his followers, who were unarmed and riding mules, into three parties, with whispered orders, and a noisy but harmless scuffle ensued. It was his young wife, supported by the Duke and Duchess of Milan, who had started this new and dangerous game. But the Signor Lodovico took it as a delightful jest, and they all rode home together. Afterwards we saw some young fellows run a kind of lance-race, and the evening ended with a most lively supper.

But Beatrice has such a passionate love for practical jokes that even this did not satisfy her. She declared that she and her cousin Isabella desired to visit the Certosa, and we rode there, with all the ladies-in-waiting. When we arrived, we found a bale of coloured stuffs awaiting us, and under our leader's orders we all set to work, the young Princess as hard as anyone, to make Turkish costumes under her direction, in which we clothed ourselves the next day. We then set forth to meet the two Dukes, who rode to fetch us from the Certosa, and they both professed the greatest delight and amusement at Beatrice's spirit and cleverness. There seems to be a curious taste here for all sorts of Eastern things. You will remember, in my account of Court masques, how constantly Turks make their appearance. Another time we had a very pretty entertainment which was acted before the Court, the words being written by Gaspare Visconti. Here a company of Turks from the Orient land, having heard of the great fame of our city of Milan, arrive on the shores of Lombardy by boat, and sing loudly the praises of the "beautiful land of Lombardy, so rich, so gallant, and so fertile. . . . They

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have crossed the deep sea, they have come from afar . . . and all to see the beautiful country of Lombardy."

We had been promised a noble tournament at Pavia, to celebrate the christening of the little Count of Pavia, our darling ; but it has been deferred, and I much fear will never come off, now that the expected visit of the Marchesa Isabella of Mantua is given up for the present. I will send this letter to-day, as I hear that a special messenger is starting for the Court of Naples. Write to me often, my Agnese, and ever love your faithful sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XII

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 14th day of March, 1492.

AL NOME DI DIO.

In your last letter you ask me, dear Agnese, how it is that I never write to you about politics and matters of State, concerning our country. But indeed, my sister, it seems to me that you at Naples are far more in the centre of information than I am at Milan. I am deeply interested in all that you tell me of the secret ambition of the young King Charles VIII. of France, now that he is free from the regency of his wise sister, Anne of Beaujeu. Yet it appears to me incredible that he should think of disturbing the peace of Europe by asserting that old claim of the House of Anjou to Naples. May Heaven grant that this terrible rumour do not prove true, and that your words, "the lull before the storm," may not be prophetic.

The French King shows every desire to be friendly to the ruler of Milan, and has promised his consent to the application made him for renewing the investiture of Genoa, which his father, Louis XI., granted to the Duke Francesco of Milan. Great preparations have been made for the reception of the French ambassadors, who have just arrived in our city to carry out this purpose. The Most Christian King's envoys are lodged in the Castello; the Duchess of Bari having given up her

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splendid chambers to the Scotch Lord d'Aubigny, even her private room with beautiful cupids painted over the mantelpiece. I must explain that she and Lodovico are at present at Vigevano. The ambassador next in rank has been placed in the Duke's own suite, and the third, the Italian doctor of the King of France, has fine rooms on the ground-floor. The apartments have all been newly decorated, with hangings specially embroidered in fleurs-de-lis as a delicate compliment. There was a difficulty about entertaining all the French retainers in the Castello, which already holds more than two hundred Court officials and servants, so an arrangement has been made to lodge them, at the expense of the State, in various inns within the city.

There was, as usual, a splendid reception, and you will be interested to hear that both the Duke of Milan and the Duke of Bari were presented with superb suits of white velvet from Lyons, to wear at the great ceremony of investiture. It was really the most gorgeous material I have ever seen, and my Duchess would have loved a dress so dazzling in its beauty, for herself. As for the young Duke of Milan, he enjoyed the whole pomp and outward parade of the ceremony, even when he had to do homage to the Lord d'Aubigny as representing the King of France, his suzerain. But he was by no means pleased at being compelled to attend all the important private meetings with the French envoys, to arrange a Treaty of alliance, and he was greatly bored by their long, formal speeches. It was his way to come into the *sala* of the Duchess and refresh himself with wine; then he would blurt out the most secret matters with disconcerting frankness.

His wife would listen in silent dismay, while he assured

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her that not only is the French King resolved to make good his claim to Naples, inherited from René of Anjou, but that the Duke of Orleans, who inherited Asti from his grandmother, Valentine Visconti, also asserts his right to the Duchy of Milan, in default of Visconti heirs. Then there is trouble about an ally of France, the Marquis of Montferrat, who complains that three of his cities have been annexed to Milan.

I am afraid that you are right, Agnese, and that trouble is brewing. However, my Duchess has talked with me, and she believes that the Triple Alliance will endure as long as Lorenzo the Magnificent rules Florence, and while that lasts, we are too strong for Venice to attack us, and Ferrara is bound by this alliance with Beatrice. The great mountain boundary of the Alps between our Italy and France is our strongest safeguard against invasion. But when I congratulated my Duchess on the investiture of Genoa bestowed upon her husband, she only sighed: "That is no personal gift to my poor Gian; he is only the figurehead. It is simply an assertion that the fief of Genoa is continued to the Duke of Milan, whoever he may be."

Meantime, the ambassadors are entertained in the most splendid fashion, and they are greatly impressed with the wealth and magnificence of this State, and more especially with the beauty of Milan, its Castello and Cathedral, its busy streets and air of prosperity. They are taken out hunting; they are shown the various royal palaces and villas, with their wonderful gardens; and I fear that their envy, as well as their delight, is awakened. But as far as I can learn, nothing is likely to be settled about the alliance with France—perhaps the arbiter of Milan is waiting to see which foreign Power bids highest.



Photo, Anderson.

Luini.

BEATRICE D' ESTE, DUCHESS OF MILAN.

To face page 92.

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I am troubled to learn that my last letter never reached you, and I will try to remember any news I sent then. Last September we were very anxious for a short time about the Lady Beatrice, who seems to have had an attack of fever, and it was quite touching to see the distress of her husband, who scarcely left her night or day, and was always trying to find fresh amusements for her. Her favourite jester, Diodato, who came with her from Ferrara, was constantly summoned to her bedside, as there is a rooted opinion here in Milan that if a sick person can be made to laugh, it is a great step towards recovery. I am thankful to say that, early in October, the young Duchess of Bari was so far restored to health that she was able to drive six miles out from Pavia, and look on at a boar-hunt from the high seat of her chariot. This was a great delight to her, and a few days later she went for change of air to the sea-coast at Genoa, taking some singers and musicians with her, amongst whom was the sculptor Cristoforo Romano, who made that beautiful bust of Beatrice.

She was in her usual health and high spirits when we all met in the Castello of Milan in December, and she was much surprised and pleased to welcome an unexpected visitor. It seems that her sister Isabella, Marchesa of Mantua, was on a visit to her parents at Ferrara, and it occurred to her husband, the Marchese Gian Francesco, that he would make a trip on his own account. So, without telling anyone, he suddenly arrived here, and made himself very pleasant and amusing, though he is often considered rough and abrupt in society. He was most hearty in his thanks for all the presents sent to his wife from Milan—of venison and rare game, delicate fruits, peaches, apples, and pears, and especially for

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such vegetables as artichokes and truffles. He looks as if he might enjoy the pleasures of the table, and is short, and unattractive in face and person, but he gives the impression of an honest, kindly character; and between ourselves, if I were in trouble, I would rather go to him than to his charming wife, Isabella.

The Lord Lodovico was most friendly to his guest, and we had a very busy week, seeing, in his company, all the noted sights of Milan. Amongst these was a visit to the studio of the great painter Leonardo, who is a great friend and favourite of the Duke of Bari. It was a beautiful chamber, full of pictures and works of art; he also likes to have musicians round him while he paints. One of his models is a real Cupid, a fair-haired boy dressed in a delightful, quaint costume as a page. There were pupils at work, carrying out some of their master's fancies, and it was wonderful to see how absorbed the artist seemed, and how little he was disturbed by visitors. The Marchese was chiefly attracted by a sketch of a greyhound, which he praised as most true to life, for I suppose dogs and horses are the only things he really understands.

He must have been in high favour with his host, for he was actually taken to the Sala del Tesoro, in the most private part of the Rocchetto, and shown the precious store of wonderful and priceless things which are kept hidden there for safety. I will describe a few of these treasures, and I hope you will be as much interested in the account, as we were in the sight of them. The Lord Lodovico has long been a great collector of gems, and his are some of the most famous in the world. One great ruby, called the "Ear of Corn," has been priced by goldsmiths as worth two hundred and fifty

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thousand ducats (nearly half the revenue of the State). There is also a ruby with an intaglio of the Duke's profile, and another which his wife wears as a brooch, while he has a fancy for appearing in the Sancy diamond, which was found after the Battle of Nancy on the body of Charles, Duke of Burgundy. Another famous jewel is called the "Wolf," an immense diamond and three beautiful pearls, then there is the splendid diamond arrow given to Duke Francesco Sforza, and many other priceless and world-renowned gems, each of which is probably worth a King's ransom.

And besides the jewels, there are treasures of gold and silver plate, vases, dishes, goblets, salvers, beyond the dreams of avarice, which are used on state occasions to deck the princely tables. Of the immense store of coined money and the chests of gold-dust and bars of silver I can only speak from repute, as they were not publicly opened, but I almost shudder to think what a loot it would be for a hostile army. Choice presents were selected for the favoured guest, who probably understood that they were bestowed more on his wife's behalf than his own—the Lady Isabella d' Este is in such high favour with my Lord the Duke of Bari. But the last item on my list was certainly for the pleasure of the Marchese Gian Francesco alone. When he saw the Duke's menagerie of wild beasts, which are frequently being sent from Africa, he fell in love with a pair of lions, and these were promised him as soon as they were tamed enough to travel without danger. Now, I am a witness that the Duke of Bari kept his word, for the keeper in charge happens to be a friend of mine, and he sent me word only last month that I might wish good-bye to the great, beautiful, tawny beasts before they set forth

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for Mantua, in charge of a man who will teach the Marchese's grooms how to manage lions.

And now farewell, my Agnese. When you write, tell me how King Ferrante and Duke Alfonso progress in their negotiations with Pope Innocent VII. This feud between them seems to me full of danger in the present state of excited feeling in Italy. The loving devotion of your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XIII

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,

This 15th day of July, 1492.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MOST EXCELLENT AND BELOVED SISTER,

I have so much to tell you that I scarcely know how to make a beginning. It seems to me that it is no longer possible for any diplomacy to avert war throughout all Europe, since that audacious breach of faith on the part of the King of France, when he repudiated and sent home the little Princess Marguerite, after she had been educated for nine years in France as his bride. Can we wonder that the Emperor Maximilian should be furious at such treatment of his daughter? Yet I am told that the Sire de Granville, the French High Admiral, actually advised his master not to return any of the dowry, and to keep the little girl as a hostage. But this is not all the insult, for, as you know, Charles VIII. has himself married the promised bride of Maximilian, Anne de Brétagne, and annexed her broad province.

Of course, this is ancient history now, for it happened last year, and events move so fast. The King of France is more eager than ever to secure the alliance of Milan, and he sent a second Embassy here last January, which was received with even more splendour than the last, and a treaty was concluded in which the Duke of Bari is mentioned by name as "governor" of his nephew.

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[Cipher.] My Duchess was most indignant at this assumption that a man of two-and-twenty years of age should be supposed still to need a "governor." In her desire to assert her husband's rights in every way, she could scarcely think or speak of anything else ; but, alas ! she only succeeded in making him extremely ill-tempered, and his sulkiness was chiefly vented on the poor lady. He repeated all she said to his Uncle Lodovico ; he insisted upon bringing his greyhounds into her boudoir ; he took more to drink than usual, and one fatal day he actually struck her ! Indeed, Agnese, I cannot think of it without tears ; but my dear Duchess has such marvellous patience and self-control, that I sometimes hope she will raise and strengthen the poor fellow in the end. Especially since the birth of her son, I cannot help thinking that there is a touch of pitying love in her gentle forbearance. She confides to me in all other matters, but the subject of her unhappy married life is a closed book to me. I would not have it otherwise. [End of cipher.]

To return to the French Embassy. The Duke of Bari took his guests out hunting, feasted and entertained them, showed them all his treasure, to impress them more deeply, and gave them presents when they left. But unfortunately, after seeing such untold and stupendous wealth, they had expected more, and went away grumbling and unsatisfied. Possibly some rumour of this reached the Signor Lodovico ; in any case, he resolved to make amends by sending envoys to the Court of Charles VIII. in February, who were to congratulate him on his marriage with Queen Anne, and also privately to bribe all the influential Ministers with large bribes. His favourite, Count Galeazzo di San Severino, was in

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charge of this delicate mission, and Count Carlo Belgiojoso was to remain at the French Court as permanent ambassador from Milan. The French King was to be duly impressed by seeing the letters written to the "Governor" of Milan by Henry VII. of England and the Emperor Maximilian.

I was shown a very interesting account of this expedition, and some impressions of England, written by Count Galeazzo. With the rest of his company, he rode into Paris on March 28, the day and hour fixed by the astrologer Ambrogio da Rosate. Splendidly clothed in gold brocade, they were received by the King himself, who listened patiently to a long oration in Latin, and the next day they again had audience with Charles VIII., and also his Queen, who wore a dress of gold brocade, and a cape of lion-skin lined with crimson velvet. On her head she wore a cap of black velvet, with a short gold fringe hanging over her forehead, and the hood which covered her head was trimmed with diamonds. Our Duchesses here are greatly interested in this new shape of cap, and are very anxious to have it copied, that they may wear it in Milan. I am told that the Duke of Bari has written to the Secretary of the Embassy, Antonio Calco, bidding him obtain a drawing of the Queen's costume, for to him the slightest wish of his young wife is always a matter of supreme importance. This visit to Paris excited general interest, and Messer Gaspare Visconti showed us a letter in sonnet form, which he was sending to one of the Ambassadors, asking endless questions. "We would know about this King of France : is he kind or cruel, good or bad ? And the Queen—is she beautiful ?" Then he asks how the people in the streets are clad, what are their manners and customs, how they speak and think. He would know about the University

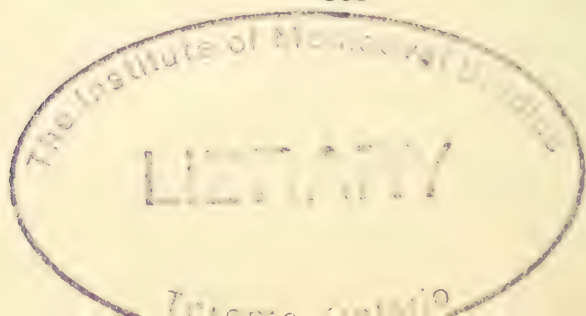
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of Paris, the number of students, the historians and teachers of law, and the classical antiquities to be found ; also concerning the Abbey of St. Denis and the architecture of Northern churches. . . .

I was much interested to hear from you that the King of Naples had also sent a mission to the King of France, under the plea of wishing to buy horses and dogs for hunting, but in reality to be first in the field. However, from what I learn, Charles VIII. has already made firm alliance with the Duke of Bari, and trusts to his help. He has written to inform the Pope of this treaty.

The success of this expedition to France has given great pleasure here, and we seem to be having more festivities than usual. The christening entertainments in honour of our little Count of Pavia, which were put off last year, have taken place here with great success. In the splendid tournament held in the park, Count Galeazzo came off once more victorious. We have also had some very fine dramatic performances, which were arranged by the great architect Bramante, who seems to be a universal genius. The "Amphitryon" of Plautus was represented, and there was a most beautiful Olympus shown to us, in which lamps took the place of stars, and some charming little children were dressed as planets. The whole effect was excellent, and the play was given with musical interludes. Another night we had a representation of the "Menæchmi" by the same classical author, and in this we were all much delighted to see a boat with oars and sails move across the stage, with ten persons on board. You would have enjoyed these dramas extremely, for all the costumes were so exquisite and appropriate, and the acting was full of life and vigour.

When these more public entertainments were over, the



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two Duchesses had leisure to renew their favourite readings of Dante, Petrarch, and other Italian poets, with a select company of kindred spirits. Amongst these are Bellincione the Court poet, Niccolo da Correggio and his charming wife Cassandra Colleoni, Antonio Fregoso, Galeazzo di San Severino, Gaspare Visconti, and Madonna Cecilia, with various other poets or men of letters. In the summer-time these pleasant meetings are held in the shady gardens or in the pleached arbours, where the sound of fountains or running waters makes a delicious accompaniment. Only yesterday Messer Antonio Grifo, a devoted student of Dante, read the pathetic story of Francesca and Paolo, which moved us all to tears.

You remember how in the Second Circle of the "Inferno," amid those who counted both worlds well lost for love, the poet sees from afar two spirits that go lightly together, and being entreated by "the love which leads them," they come to him as doves to their nest. Then Francesca speaks . . . and the tragedy of love and atonement which we know so well is told—how the romance of Lancelot lay before the lovers in that open book . . . and "that day they read no more." We were bidden to observe how, with all his tender compassion for the sinners, Dante metes out unswerving justice to the sin. The lovers are placed within those dread portals where all hope is left behind, but they are together—eternal love in the midst of eternal sorrow.

I would ask you to forgive this digression, but I know, Agnese, that you love to take part in all we say and do. Yet I must not end upon this tragic note. We are as full of interest in the present as in the past, and when the reading was over, we had a most striking account of the great success of this University of Padua. Messer

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Giorgio Merula could not say enough with regard to the munificence with which men of learning are encouraged ; only this year many of the professors have had their salaries doubled. He quoted to us a Latin poem of Lancino Cursio, which says how " The Germans, with fair skins and long flowing hair, the knights from the land of Gaul and England, the dwellers by the golden sands of the Tagus, all flock hither from distant parts. The Iberian, the Pannonian, lay down their arms to throng into the virgin temple of learning, and beneath the stately dome of wisdom they crowd to the Helicon of Phœbus, which raises to heaven the fame of Lodovico." It would take too long to write out all the names of the famous teachers assembled at Pavia, but every science and every art is represented by the greatest names in Italy. There is a splendid school of music, which has no rival in Europe, and for painting and sculpture, as you know, we have masters such as the world has never seen before.

With regard to architecture, I must tell you about a visit we have but lately paid to the Certosa of Pavia. I have already spoken of the great interest taken by Duke Lodovico in the building of the magnificent church of the monastery, begun nearly a hundred years ago by Gian Galeazzo Visconti. It was by the Duke of Bari's special invitation that my Duchess and two of her ladies were to join him and the Duchess Beatrice on a visit to this famous monastery, where we were to sleep one night as guests of the Prior and monks. On arriving at the Certosa, we were met by the architect Giovanni Amadeo, a son of the people, who was born at a farm close by, and who showed such wonderful talent as a child that the greatest masters were proud to have him as their pupil. We could not have had a better guide,

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for he is full of enthusiasm, and devotes his whole time to the work. He showed us the plans of the magnificent façade which he began last year, and whose marble arcades and pillars are light and beautiful as lacework; but it will take years to complete. We saw some of the marvellous designs for decoration, singing angels, coats of arms, heads of cherubs, and exquisite mouldings of leaves and flowers and fruit. The Duke pointed out to us a group of angels on a doorway leading out of the cloisters, which he said was the earliest work of this gifted sculptor and architect. I only wish that you could see those lovely cloisters, and, indeed, the whole fair fabric is far beyond my power to describe.

I cannot tell you how much my Lady Isabella enjoyed those peaceful two days, and it was with sad regret that we turned our horses' heads away from the calm precincts of the Certosa to return to the turmoil and excitement of Court life. The Duchess Bona has been staying lately at the Castello of Pavia, and, affectionate as she is to my Duchess, the company of so unreasonable and restless a mother-in-law is certainly trying. When the news reached us in April of the death of Lorenzo dei Medici, I think we all felt that we had lost the guidance and help of a great peacemaker. But Madonna Bona loudly mourned for him as a special friend of hers, and she made a point of wearing the splendid diamond necklace which he had presented to her, when he came to Milan to be godfather to our young Duke Gian Galeazzo. All the magnificence and grandeur of those past days seemed to revive in her memory; she could talk of nothing else, and she gave us quite a fabulous account—or so it seemed—of a certain visit she had paid to Florence with her husband, the Duke Galeazzo.

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It was in March, 1471, and she thus described the magnificent escort which accompanied them : One hundred men-at-arms and five hundred infantry as a guard ; fifty running footmen, richly dressed in silk and silver ; and so many noblemen and courtiers that, with their various retinues, there were about two thousand horsemen in the company. Five hundred couple of dogs, with a countless number of falcons and hawks, completed the pageant.

Madonna Bona added that the Illustrissimo Lorenzo received as many guests as he could possibly entertain in his own palace, while the remainder of the multitude were provided for at the expense of the city. This sounded almost incredible, but the young Duke of Milan declared that he had heard of this since he was a small child, and he appealed to his Uncle Lodovico, who gravely confirmed the whole story as actual truth. " Indeed, it must have cost my brother more than two hundred thousand gold ducats—a fearful waste, for which his wife was in a measure responsible," he added bitterly.

But I will own that my feeling was one of pity for the poor lady, when I thought of the contrast between those days of sumptuous magnificence and the present time, when she is treated as of small account and unwelcome, in the very scenes of her former grandeur. Ah me ! what changes there are in this world ! What might not happen to any one of us in the future ?

Now, Agnese, I must bring this long letter to a close. Commend me to the dear Queen Juana, from whom I have not heard for some time, though I have sent her more than one letter. With my unchanging love, and prayers for your happiness in this world and the next,

Your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XIV

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 30th day of August, 1492.

AL NOME DI DIO.

DEAR AGNESE, MY HONOURED SISTER,

Since I wrote to you last, one subject alone has filled our thoughts and cast all else in the shade, alike with you and ourselves : the death of Pope Innocent VIII., and the election of Cardinal Roderigo Borgia to succeed him in the Chair of St. Peter. When the news first reached us, the excitement here was intense, and Duke Lodovico was receiving messengers almost daily from his brother, the Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, of whose success in the coming Conclave he had every hope. But it soon became plain that the Borgia Cardinal had the better chance, and my Lord Ascanio, with shrewd wisdom, accepted the inevitable, and at once threw all his efforts on the side of his rival, thereby winning for himself the eternal gratitude of the new Pope, Alexander VI., as we call him. I hear that our Venetian ambassador has had the courage to say : " The Pontificate has been sold, with simony and a thousand rascalities and shamefulness, which is an ignominious and detestable thing."

However, this is quite an aside, and in Milan there is the greatest satisfaction in the fact that Cardinal Ascanio is in the highest favour at Rome, and supposed to have as much power as if he were Pope himself. Tell me,

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Agnese, when you write, how this new Pope will affect the truce concluded in January with Naples, and what side he will take as regards any possible French invasion. I fear that it must have been a great disappointment to King Ferrante that the Cardinal della Rovere was not elected, and it cannot add to his friendly feeling towards Duke Lodovico and his brother the Cardinal. But, as you once said, this is "the lull before the storm," which no words of ours can put off for a day.

Now I will turn to social matters, of which the chief is the coming of the Lady Isabella, Marchesa of Mantua, on a visit to her sister. Her arrival had been long talked of, and great preparations had been made, but it was not until August 15 that the great lady reached Pavia, and was met there with much ceremony by all the Court. My Duchess and the Lady Beatrice, both in splendid array, rode forth to meet her, embraced her publicly, and then, one on each side of their guest, they led her through the city, where she was hailed with enthusiasm. On the way she was met by the Duke of Milan and the Duke of Bari, a company of ambassadors with outriders, and the martial music of the trumpeters accompanied her to the gate of the Castello. Under the plea that the Marchesa was weary after her journey, there was no banquet that night, but the two sisters, Isabella and Beatrice, supped together in private. No doubt they had much to talk of, but at that moment the great subject of public discussion was the election of the new Pope, of which news had but lately arrived.

Isabella had hoped to meet her father, Ercole Duke of Ferrara, at Pavia; but she was told that he had been obliged to leave the Certosa, where he was staying with his son-in-law, Lodovico, in order to attend to important

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matters of State at home in connection with the change of Popes. However, he returned as soon as possible, and brought with him the young Prince Alfonso, who was delighted to meet his two sisters again. In the Duke's train, there had come a company of his favourite actors and singing youths of his Court, and amongst these a most interesting young man of eighteen, by name Lodovico Ariosto, a subject of Duke Ercole, having been born at Reggio, who is said to have a great gift for poetry and acting. He was very modest and pleasant in talk, and he told me that his father would have had him study law, but that all his tastes were for literature and the drama. He is an ardent student of Latin poetry, more especially Horace and Catullus, and hopes to be introduced to some of the famous men of letters at the University.

Endless feasts, banquets, and entertainments of all kinds were provided for the noble visitors, but that which seemed to delight them more than anything else was the hunting. By the special influence of the Duke of Ferrara, the ambassadors who had arrived from Naples, amongst whom were some old friends of my Duchess and mine, were invited to join in the hunting excursions, and it was a great pleasure to me to talk of old times, before we left our dear home, four years ago. I must tell you about the other day, when we all rode to a place about four miles off, San Pirono by name, and white tents were placed at the edge of a thick forest, where we could rest when weary of hunting, and watch the stags, one of which Count Galeazzo chased and killed with a long spear. Some of the party went on to dine at Belriguardo, but we returned to the Castello of Pavia. To my mind the most successful expedition was one which we took later in August to a beautiful wooded valley near the Ticino,

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where there was plenty of shade from the hot sun, and we were close to the hillside, on which a pergola of green boughs had been made, and there were tents for resting, of which we ladies were glad to avail ourselves. I never saw anyone more keen at this sport than the two sisters, between whom there was a friendly rivalry, and the Marchesa was greatly delighted when she killed a wild goat. Duchess Beatrice was in at the death when a wild boar was killed; but I think that young Alfonso of Ferrara enjoyed himself more than all the others. He and Count Galeazzo were most adventurous in galloping up the hills in chase of the stags, and later on they had some still finer sport in the pursuit of an old wolf, which they at length succeeded in killing.

But I think the part which I enjoyed most was the long ride home in the cool of the evening, when we cheered the way with music and song, and enjoyed our supper the more from the exciting influence of a day of toil and pleasure, spent in such delightful surroundings. I was amused to hear that the young Marchesa Isabella, who is only just eighteen, has all the wisdom and forethought of an old married woman, for the next day she sent her husband, at Mantua, four great venison pasties to console him for her absence. If she always consults his tastes in this way, we may be sure that she has learnt the secret of managing him.

October 7.—I have delayed forwarding this letter, as I sent you so many messages by my friends from Naples, and they will have told you about all our doings. For a spoken report from one who has looked upon your sister and talked to her, is more to you, I am sure, than a whole packet of letters. And I have news which will make you at once joyful and anxious. We are hoping that

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early in the new year, my Duchess may have another little child to gladden her life. This is made more exciting by the fact that the same hope is awakened in the Duchess of Bari ; but I think both these ladies are very rash to devote themselves so much to fatiguing sports like hunting. For after Duke Ercole and his son had left us, we all went on to Mortara, and from thence to Novara, and in both places there were some wonderful boar-hunts, which both the sisters, Beatrice and Isabella, enjoyed immensely, and in which my Duchess took some share, much to my anxiety.

It was quite a relief to me when, in the middle of September, we all returned to Milan, the Marchesa Isabella again riding in state between our Duchess and her own sister Beatrice. Madonna Bona and her daughter Bianca were awaiting us in the Castello, having recently arrived from the villa at Abbiate-Grasso, where they spend much of their time. The Duke's mother is very much annoyed just now with her brother-in-law, the Lord Lodovico, as he has refused the request of King Charles VIII. asking that his Aunt Bona (she is the sister of his mother, Charlotte of Savoy) might come to be with his wife, Queen Anne, at the expected birth of her child.

The Duke of Bari has pointed out to the aggrieved lady that both her daughter-in-law, the Duchess Isabella, and his own young wife, Beatrice, will afford her a like interest early next year. I believe he is really afraid that she may use her influence against him at the French Court, for there is no love lost between them, although they keep up a kind of armed neutrality.

If other people have their secret anxieties, at least the young Marchesa of Mantua is thoroughly enjoying

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herself. Her vivid delight in all the amusements provided for her is pleasant to see. She was in a state of wild enthusiasm when the Lord Lodovico showed her all his wonderful treasures, and she laughingly remarked to me that if all that wealth were hers, she was sure she could get much more enjoyment out of it. She has just persuaded her brother-in-law to send for some swans from Mantua, and the beautiful white birds certainly give another charm to the delightful gardens and artificial lakes of this Castello. I was in the company of the two Duchesses the other day, when they took the Marchesa to see some brocades in the house of one of the chief merchants. She was greatly attracted by one magnificent gold and silver tissue, which was adorned with exquisite embroidery, representing the towers of the lighthouse at Genoa—quite a new design, with a motto worked in letters of gold. When, on returning home, she expressed her admiration of the brocade, the Duke of Bari at once made her a present of fifteen yards for a robe (at a cost of six hundred ducats). He had already given one to the Duchess Beatrice. The two appeared in these sumptuous costumes together, before the Lady Isabella left us to go to Genoa.

We had a serious alarm a few days ago, for the young Duchess of Bari will not listen to any advice, and insisted on going hunting at Cussago with her husband, and there she found herself of a sudden in face of a dangerous boar, which she fearlessly attacked. Fortunately, help was at hand, but the shock and fatigue of that day brought on a touch of fever, which greatly alarmed the Duke of Bari, and her sister Isabella has returned from Genoa to be with her. I am glad to say that the young Duchess is going on very well, and has the most lively time in her bed-chamber, with the frolics of her own pet jester, Diodato,

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and the comic singing of Serafino, whose quaint little figure has the most marvellous attraction for the Este ladies.

To turn to a more serious matter : I was on the point of ending this letter, when my Duchess sent for me to her private chamber. She was in a state of painful excitement, quite unusual to one of her wonderful self-control. When the door was carefully closed, she held out to me a letter in the handwriting of Duke Lodovico.

“ Read this, Violante. Did you ever hear of anything so base and cruel ? Why should I be subject to such vile insinuations and insults ? ” And the dear lady broke down with bitter tears.

I glanced hastily at the written words, which seemed to blaze at me in letters of fire, as I slowly realized their terrible meaning. There could be no mistake in their meaning. My dear Duchess, the noblest and most pious woman who ever lived, was accused of seeking “ to administer to Galeazzo da San Severino, and to Ronzone, a favourite of the Duke her husband, a deadly poison in the shape of a mysterious white powder.” Was this some vile conspiracy to ruin the fame of the young Duke of Milan’s wife, the only person who attempted to stand up for his rights, and to whom, poor lady, in her present delicate health, such a cruel attack might have fatal results ? I had the sense to see this, and furious as I was, I treated the matter with the contempt which it deserved, and lightly remarked : “ Do not trouble about this, dear lady ; there is some strange mistake. But I will send this letter and any other information I can obtain, to your illustrious father, the Duke of Calabria. He will settle the matter with the help of your grandfather, the King, who is not a man to be trifled with,

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Trust me ; you shall hear no more about it, and I will see that your accusers are brought to shame."

Even with this promise, it was some time before I could soothe and comfort my dear lady ; so you will forgive me, dear Agnese, for this abrupt ending, as I have so much before me.

Ever your most loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XV

CORTE DUCALE, IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 30th day of January, 1493.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE, MY DEAREST SISTER,

I have no room in my heart for any feeling save joy and thankfulness that my dear lady has passed safely through her ordeal, and is the mother of a beautiful daughter, perfect in health and strength. This will be indeed good news to you, for I am sure you must have read between the lines, that our beloved little Francesco has always been frail and delicate and, I must confess, backward for his age. He is now more than two years old. Still, there is cause for hope in that he has now passed through those most perilous months of infancy, and we know that great strong men have been small and fragile in early childhood. Under our loving care, the dear boy will surely develop into all that we desire and pray for.

You have, of course, heard that a son was born to the Duchess Beatrice on the 25th of this month, for the news has been loudly proclaimed throughout Europe, with trumpet and clarion sound. Never was any infant welcomed with more pomp and triumph. The Duke of Bari is almost beside himself with exultation, and the public rejoicings which he has commanded are such as would be suitable for the heir of a great empire. For

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six days all the bells of churches and abbeys have been ringing incessantly ; solemn processions have been made to every shrine, prisoners have been set free, and the people are encouraged by largesse to shout through the streets " Moro ! Moro !" You know that is a popular name for the Duke. The most reckless extravagance is the order of the day. Will you believe me when I tell you that a golden cradle was prepared—a real work of art, with delicate columns, and pale blue hangings of silk—and a coverlet of cloth of gold ? It is impossible to describe the magnificence of the costly brocades and tapestries, procured at fabulous expense to adorn the chambers of the Duchess of Bari and her child—indeed, the whole suite, through which the guests are constantly bringing the most sumptuous gifts. These are vessels of gold and silver, priceless works of art and luxury such as surpass anything seen here before ! The very pages and attendants are clothed in silver brocade, while the great bedstead of the Duchess Beatrice herself is simply dazzling and beyond the bounds of taste, with its hangings of mulberry and gold, the names Lodovico and Beatrice in solid gold on the crimson canopy, and a fringe round of golden balls. [Cipher.] A sort of King Midas arrangement, I call it. May it never turn to dust and ashes !

The Duchess Leonora of Ferrara has been here for some weeks in attendance on her daughter, but we have seen very little of her, although she is on friendly terms with Madonna Bona, whose interest is quite absorbed by our little Princess, soon to be called Bona, after her grandmother. This good lady is furious at the unheard-of pomp and ceremony about the son of Beatrice, so far exceeding anything that was done two years ago, when



ALFONSO II., KING OF NAPLES.
Old Print.

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the real heir to the Duchy of Milan, the little Count of Pavia, was born. The old Duchess makes no attempt to hide her indignation and, unfortunately, she does her best to excite the same feeling in the mind of my dear Lady Isabella. Sometimes, in another mood, she accuses herself of having paved the way for this "usurper Lodovico," as she calls him.

"Oh, why did I ever recall him from exile, and put him in power, my treacherous brother-in-law? If I could only undo the work of that fatal day, more than twelve years ago, when we secretly let Lodovico enter the Castello by the garden door, and my Gian, who was a boy of ten, went to welcome him with me. At that time he was an exile, and in open war against the State. Well had it been if I had listened to poor Simonetta, who foretold that this would cost him his life and us our State of Milan. What a fool I have been!" Poor lady, that is the truest word she has ever spoken. But, alas! deeds are irrevocable, and the past can never be undone.

My Agnese, I must briefly touch upon that terrible accusation against my Duchess, which has darkened the heavens and made life a burden to us. You have seen the letters written to her and to the Duke Alfonso, so that you know how cruelly and bitterly the process has been carried on, even to putting those two faithful servants to the question. I have hushed up the details as far as possible from my dear mistress, and now I am thankful to say that in her new interest and joy in her little daughter, her thoughts have been distracted from this horror. Indeed, I do not wonder that the King of Naples was furious, and he did well to have the whole truth made known to the Pope by his son, Prince Federico; so that we are assured that the whole blame has been

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laid upon the Duke of Bari, as he deserves. But no more of this, for I am sick to death of it. [End of cipher.]

February 29.—I have not yet found a convenient means of sending this letter, which has so much private matter ; besides, you will have heard of the birth of little Bona from the formal message sent to the Duke of Calabria. So I must tell you what happened after Messer Ambrogio gave his permission for the two Duchesses to leave their chambers. As you know, nothing is done here without the astrologer's permission. The day fixed was Wednesday, February 24, when it was arranged that the two ladies should go, with full ceremony, to the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, to give thanks for their safe recovery, and for the mercies vouchsafed to them. My Duchess was in excellent spirits, and looked blooming in a splendid robe of gold brocade and green velvet, most delicately worked with silver thread, and caught up with crimson silk cords, while her mantle was of crimson velvet, which always becomes her so well, lined with rich grey fur. The Lady Beatrice had a gorgeous cloak of blue silk, trimmed with costly furs, open in front to show a robe of gold brocade, embroidered in blue and red. They both rode together in the great chariot of the Duchess Leonora, who looked very stately in black, with magnificent jewels.

Amongst the other noble ladies, our gentle Princess Anna Sforza had come from Ferrara with her young husband, Alfonso d' Este, and we were delighted to have her again. I had never seen her look more beautiful than she did that day in a long robe of cloth of gold with sleeves of crimson velvet, lined with sable and trimmed with gold fringe. Her sister Bianca rode by her side, and amongst the other ladies present was the old Signora

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Beatrice d' Este, illegitimate sister of Duke Ercole, once the famous beauty of the Court of Ferrara, the "Queen of Feasts." She is the mother of that gifted courtier Niccolò da Correggio, and is still charming, in stately beauty, at the age of sixty-five. Hers has been a noble and honoured life, and she has outlived her sorrow and bereavement—a contrast to that of our poor Duchess Bona, who is said to have been once very beautiful, but her face is marred with ceaseless worry and fretful regrets. Forgive me this digression, Agnese, for you know how fond I always was of moralizing.

We had a magnificent gathering that day at Santa Maria delle Grazie, and the thanksgiving service was most impressive, with a solemn *Te Deum* sung in exquisite harmony by the ducal choir. Afterwards we were all sumptuously entertained by the Count della Torre with a profuse banquet. This was the beginning of a round of festivities : there were playful races and hunting in the park, and a grand supper was given by Niccolò da Correggio and his mother the Lady Beatrice of whom I spoke, in the Castello, where she has rooms. Madonna was a good friend to the Duke of Bari in the days of his exile, and he has thus rewarded her kindness.

Are you frivolous enough to hear about the wonderful dresses worn by the Princesses ? The young Duchess of Bari went out riding one day in a rose-coloured habit, on a splendid black horse, wearing a priceless jewel in her hat ; while Anna Sforza was by her side in black and gold, with a crimson hat embroidered with real pearls. Another day, at an indoor entertainment, my Duchess wore a most wonderful robe, embroidered with strange devices of mottoes and books, which was set off by the Lady Anna's pure white dress, which she wore in accord-

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ance with a vow to wear only white for six following Saturdays. May the desire of her heart be granted to her! I forgot to mention that the Duchess Beatrice, not to be outdone, was magnificent in a crimson satin dress, all covered with knots of ribbons, which became her dark style of beauty very well. Our Duke of Milan is always at his best when there is an endless succession of entertainments, for these leave him no time to sink into his besetting gloom and discontent.

But is it not marvellous, dear Agnese, to think of all these noble lords and ladies joining together in ceremonies and amusements, with outward calm and politeness, when beneath the surface there is raging jealousy and hatred? Think of my poor dear Duchess having to smile at the Lord Lodovico, who has so cruelly sought to ruin her, and to make pleasing remarks to her cousin Beatrice who is gaily robbing her boy of his patrimony! Only I, who am behind the scenes, can tell at what a cost of self-control and agony this is accomplished.

Let us try to forget what lies beneath, and talk of trivial things. I hear that even the Duchess Leonora, daughter of a King of Naples and wife of a Duke of Ferrara, is perfectly astounded at the extravagance in dress of her daughter Beatrice. When she was shown the other day at Vigevano the sumptuous wardrobe, with eighty-four costumes of priceless material and most exquisite embroidery, she exclaimed that it was like a sacristy in some cathedral, with the accumulated wealth of ages in the way of magnificent episcopal vestments and altar-cloths. And the "wardrobe" at Vigevano is only one of several; there are others as rich at Pavia and at Milan, full of the dresses and vests and mantles and other vanities, collected in two brief years. As for the

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precious treasures my Lady Beatrice had bought in that time—of rare glass, porcelain, majolica from Faenza, enamels, ivories, crystals, all the appliances for hunting and hawking, and Heaven knows what besides—her mother cried out, almost in dismay, that “there is enough to fill many curiosity shops”!

One word more: I have enjoyed more than anything the music we have now in the evenings, given us by a company of Spanish musicians sent from Rome by Cardinal Ascanio, the Duke of Bari's brother. They have some large viols of a new shape, which give forth the most delicious strains, such as I have never heard before. And now I must say farewell, my own Agnese. I cannot tell you what a comfort it is to me to pour out thus all my troubles and all my thoughts, to your understanding soul. Love me ever as I love you.

Your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XVI

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 7th day of April, 1493.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY AGNESE, CARISSIMA,

Did I not tell you in my last letter that beneath the smiling, flowery surface of our smooth Court life there was a hidden volcano? My prophecy has come true sooner than I expected, for the smouldering fire has already broken forth, the dreaded eruption has taken place, and . . . our stately, ceremonious pleasure-seeking world is in ruins.

To the untrained eye there was no danger threatening; outward observances were kept up so long as the Duchess Leonora remained with us in Milan, for she honestly used all her influence to keep the peace. Nay, she did more than this, for, notwithstanding her devotion to her daughter Beatrice, she tried to check that young lady's ambition, for she had the justice to see the wrongs endured by her niece Isabella, the daughter of her own brother, Duke Alfonso of Calabria. But since the departure of the Duchess of Ferrara and that of the gentle, friendly Anna Sforza, my poor Lady Isabella has felt that she was alone in a hostile camp. Her cousin Beatrice, in the new pride and pomp of motherhood, makes no attempt at conciliation; indeed, I have reason to believe that she is urging her husband to usurp the title, as well as the authority, of Duke of Milan.

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My Duchess has no one to help her, for her husband, Duke Gian Galeazzo, is more hopeless than ever, caring only for sport, for amusement, and for unworthy dissipation, until at last his young wife is driven to the end of her patience.

Late at night last Wednesday I was summoned to her private chamber, and I could have wept to see how pale and agitated she was. Never had I seen my dear Lady's self-control so utterly broken down, as when she vowed that she would no longer endure the humiliations to which she and her husband the Duke were exposed, and that she would send such a letter to her father as would put an end to them. She bid me sit down to the table and write from her dictation a rough draft of what she purposed to say. I obeyed in silence, for I felt that my Duchess was not in a mood to listen to reason. This is a copy :

“ *Illustrissimo e Eccellentissimo Signor, mio Padre . . .*” she began, and then paused to think of words strong enough to express her fury. “ It is now five years since you married me to Gian Galeazzo, in the full belief that in due time he would succeed to the crown of his father and sit upon the throne of Galeazzo and Francesco Sforza and of his Visconti ancestors. Now, Gian is of full age, and is a father himself, but he is still kept as a child ; he has never been put in command of his dominions, and even his food and clothing are doled out to him by Lodovico and his Ministers. It is Lodovico who rules the State, who is the arbiter of war and peace, who bestows honours and rewards, who collects the taxes, listens to petitions, and keeps the public money in his hands. He has absolute rule, while we have no friends or money,

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and are merely his subjects. It is Lodovico, and not Gian Galeazzo, who is the acknowledged ruler of this realm. It is he who dismisses Governors from the castles, and puts his own minions in their place ; the army is his, the magistrates are his servants, and his word is law. He, in short, is the real Duke of Milan.

“ A son has recently been born to his wife, and all the world declares that this child will soon be named Count of Pavia and, as his heir, will succeed to the Dukedom. At his birth he received royal honours, while my husband and son are treated with contempt, and it is at the peril of our lives that we remain beneath the roof of this Castello, from which Lodovico would expel us in his envy and hatred ; he would leave me widowed and forlorn, without help or friends. Yet I have not fallen so low but that I still have courage and spirit ; and our people look upon us with pity, and think of him with hatred and malediction, for he has robbed them of money and land to satisfy his grasping desires. I am trampled on with humiliations, for I am but a woman, and cannot hold my own. I have no one to consult, for our very attendants are in his service.

“ But if you can be moved by your paternal piety, by your love for me, by my just tears, by the magnanimity of a King . . . I pray you to deliver your son-in-law and your daughter from this shameful servitude, and restore to them their rightful dominion. If you will not help us, I would rather die by my own hands than bear this tyrannous yoke and suffer in a strange country under the eyes of a rival.”

My pen had moved almost without my will, for I felt entranced, like some actor in an unrehearsed tragedy.

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But when the low, thrilling voice was silent, I looked up, to see my dear Duchess bowed forward, with her face buried in her hands and her frail figure shaken with sobs—moved, as it were, to agony by her own piteous appeal. I sank on my knees by the side of her chair, and kissed her cold hands. Then, as though roused by my touch, she cried out of a sudden :

“ It is all true, Violante. Deny it, if you can !”

“ Madonna,” I whispered, “ I would deny nothing. But, indeed, I think you cannot send this letter. If I know your illustrious father aright, this pathetic story of your wrongs will so rouse him to fierce rage that nothing can follow but open war to the death. And when he marches to do battle on your account, think, dear Lady, of your helpless, desperate position—of your husband and children who are here, absolutely at the mercy of the man whom you will have made your implacable foe——”

“ I have thought of nothing else, Violante—oh, for so long !” she interrupted, with a stern, set face. “ Better an open enemy than a treacherous friend. It is wiser to face the truth now than to live on in a fool’s paradise. I see no hope for the present or the future but in violent compulsion, and surely it is the first duty of a wife to support her husband, and of a mother to assert the just rights of her son ! As peaceful means have failed, then we must welcome war.”

What could I urge in reply to this note of assured conviction, of terrible earnest ? It was no use pointing out to her how uncertain would be the fortune of war, and what might be the fate of the vanquished. My Duchess knows so little of the fearful complications on every side, which probably you understand better than I do.

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From all that you tell me, there seems to be little doubt that the young King of France, Charles VIII., has quite decided to free himself from the control of his wise sister, the Regent Anne, and that he has absolutely set his heart upon the invasion of Italy. His gay courtiers, who have seen nothing more like war than a tournament, urge the Prince to distinguish himself in a great campaign, and win the glory of another Charlemagne ; and I can quite understand how the exiles from Naples who have taken refuge in Paris fan the flame by dwelling upon the beauty of their native land, and its unprepared condition. You see, these rebel lords have nothing to lose by war, and everything to gain. Meantime, we can but hope that the States of Italy will combine against invasion, for in unity alone is their strength.

Write to me often, Agnese, and let me share all your news, even if it be of evil import ; for, indeed, I am full of deep anxiety lest the letter of my dear, ill-used Duchess may not stir up dangerous strife, at this delicate crisis for our Italy. All my love and all my trust are in you, my Agnese, for whom I desire all good things in this world and the next.

Ever your devoted sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XVII

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 23rd day of May, 1493.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY AGNESE,

Your letter, so full of wise and tender sympathy, of hope and comfort, yet does but confirm my deep conviction, that the passionate and eloquent appeal of my Duchess will have no more result than would the flapping wings of a wounded bird against a stone wall.

You should have seen with what eager hope she received the despatches from Naples, and read the reply of her father, the Duke of Calabria. In his first instinct of fierce rage he swore that "one of his blood should never endure such cruel outrage," and, if he had his will, he would have declared open war against Duke Lodovico at once. But then we saw how the old King Ferrante wrote with his usual caution, and prayed his granddaughter to have patience for a while and, by the grace of God, all would be well. He pointed out the coming danger to all Italy, but more especially to his kingdom of Naples, if the French King should carry out his threat of invasion. He would be the first to lose his crown and his realm . . . and my poor Duchess sadly owned that this was true.

King Ferrante has written a most diplomatic and friendly letter to the Duke of Bari, of which I already see

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the good effect in increased kindness from him, and also from the Duchess Beatrice, to her cousin Isabella. In her own assured happiness and triumph, she may well have mercy upon her unfortunate victim. The young Princess is always very courteous to me, and only yesterday she pressed me most earnestly to induce my Duchess to join her in a most interesting reception which was to take place in her splendid Sala della Palla, when she was expecting a certain Spanish gentleman, who had a most wonderful story to tell.

When the Lady Isabella found how anxious I was to hear a tale of adventure, she was readily persuaded to give me the opportunity, by honouring the meeting with her presence. The young Spaniard was introduced to us as Señor Garcia Pinzen, the son of the well-known ship-owner at the Port of Palos, Señor Martin Alonzo Pinzen. He is studying medicine under the learned Alvise Marliani at the University of Milan, and there he has made the acquaintance of a distinguished youth, Messer Baldassare Castiglione, newly arrived from Mantua, with letters of commendation to the Duchess Beatrice, from her sister the Marchesa Isabella. With a little help in our language from his companion, Señor Garcia gave us the astounding news which he had just received from his father. I will try to give the story in his words :

“ A Savona sailor has returned to the Port of Palos, by name Cristoforo Colon (Columbus), from a voyage over the seas, commissioned by the Queen of Spain the illustrious Isabella, she being at that time at the Siege of Granada. This Cristoforo was looked upon as a dreamer, for his earnest purpose was to ‘ make a voyage to the East by sailing West across the Atlantic.’ In vain had all the wise men of the University of Salamanca told him

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that this was 'vain, impossible, against all knowledge and the teaching of the Bible,' and they called him an atheist and refuted him with texts from St. Augustine. But this Cristoforo, nothing daunted, set sail from Palos on Friday, August 3 of last year. Three vessels were made ready, manned with ninety sailors, and provisioned for a year. The *Santa Maria* was commanded by Colon himself, who was called El Almirante, and the two others, called 'caravels,' had my father and uncle for their captains."

When the young man had modestly reached thus far in his story, there were cries of encouragement, and the eyes of all the company were fixed upon him with immense interest. If his own people had taken part in the expedition, he had, indeed, a right to tell the story, and he was pressed to continue, while all present listened with flattering attention.

"My father, Martin Alonzo, had command of the *Pinta*, and my uncle, Vicente Janez Pinzen, had the *Nina* under him. I must add that the leaders and all the crew made confession and received the Sacrament, like good Christians, before sailing. I will read you a few entries from the log-book of the voyage. 'Gomera, in the Canary Islands, was left on September 6, and a fresh breeze swept the three vessels across the Atlantic. 14th: The sailors of the *Nina* saw two tropical birds. 15th: All saw a meteor fall from heaven, which made them very sad. 16th: Came upon those immense plains of seaweed, the Mare de Sargossa. 17th: The needle declines a whole point to W.; sailors begin to murmur. 18th: They see many birds, and a cloud in the distance. 19th: They see a pelican in the morning; another in the evening. Drizzling rain without wind—a certain sign of land.

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October 11th : A table-board and carved stick are found ; a branch of haw-tree, with fruit, drifts by. El Almirante sees a light on shore. Friday, 12th : Land seen from the *Pinta*. . . . To this first island discovered was given the name of San Salvador, in commemoration of His Divine Majesty who has wonderfully granted this. The next island was called Santa Maria, and they found certain others, and a very big one lying east, nearly as large as Spain, with broad rivers and terrible mountains, and a very fertile land, inhabited by handsome men and women, who go naked or only wear a cotton-leaf round the waist. This country abounds in gold, and is doubtless the ancient Ophir, from whence came all the riches of Solomon. There are quantities of palms of more than six different kinds, and some wonderfully tall trees. The rivers there run with gold, and there is plenty of copper, but no iron ; and you can see neither the Arctic nor the Antarctic poles. The people, who are of a copper-coloured skin, eat roots of trees and some big kind of nut, which is like pepper, but yields good food, and on this they live."

"How I should like to see them !" exclaimed the Duchess Beatrice. "Tell us, Señor Garcia, did this wonderful admiral bring none of them back ?"

"Yes, gracious Madonna. My father tells me they brought back twelve men and four women, who have been sent to the King of Spain. They also had great store of pepper, sandal-wood, and spices, as well as gold, and about sixty parrots, as big as falcons and as red as pheasants, besides many other treasures. My father says that El Almirante is to have a great reception at Barcelona from the King and Queen, who desire to do him great honour, and who have sent a letter to the Pope, asking him to

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confer upon Spain all new lands discovered in the 'Indies.' "

"Indeed, your Cristoforo deserves all fame and glory," said Count Galeazzo San Severino. "You must tell us more about him, my Señor. Why did he think to find new lands in the far East, and so reach to the Indies?"

"For many years, my lord, he had pored over maps and charts, while all men mocked at him," replied Señor Garcia Pinzen. "But he never lost courage, for he told my father that once, as he slept beneath the tower of Belem, he heard a heavenly voice, which whispered: 'God will cause thy name to be wonderfully resounded through the earth, and will give thee the keys of the gates of the ocean, which are closed with strong chains.' El Almirante vows that never while he lives will he cease from the pursuit of his great search, of a new and shorter ocean-path westward across the Atlantic to the Indian Empire. He may have to pass by the land of Prester John and of Kublai Khan, and for this cause the Spanish Sovereigns have given him letters of commendation to present to any Eastern Prince or potentate, with 'greetings from Fernando and Isabel.' "

After due thanks had been given to the Spanish gentleman for his most amazing and delightful story, the Duchess Beatrice and my Duchess had some talk with the very handsome and courtly boy who accompanied him, Messer Baldassare Castiglione. Having so recently arrived at Milan from Mantua, he was able to give the latest news of the Marchesa Isabella, who seems to be an intimate friend and connection of his mother, the Lady Aloysia Castiglione, who is the wife of Count Cristoforo Castiglione of Casatico. They are very high in Court favour, as when a marriage was arranged for Chiara, the sister of

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the Marchese Francesco of Mantua, with Gilbert the Duke of Montpensier, Count Castiglione and his wife were chosen to escort the bride to France. My Duchess has taken a great fancy to young Baldassare, and has asked him to join her literary receptions, which I have strongly urged her to continue ; for, in truth, her life here would now be impossible without some alleviations.

I have had the curiosity to make some inquiries concerning Messer Baldassare Castiglione, from Count Galeazzo, Messer Niccolò Correggio, and others, and I find that, although he is still so young—only fifteen—yet he is a lad of very great literary promise, in high favour with the Professors of Philosophy and Poetry ; and that he is also the finest horseman of his age in Milan. I hope that we may see much of him in the coming days. He would delight to go hunting with us. My Duchess was especially struck with his pleasant manners and the modesty with which he made reply to her questions about himself, and his tastes in reading.

And now farewell, my Agnese, for after these great themes of travel and adventure, I cannot fall back upon smaller matters. What a dream it would be, if you and I could sail off together in a caravel across the sunny western seas, and reach at length a beautiful island of peace and rest !

Ever your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.



Photo, Mansell.

Raphael.

BALDASSARE CASTIGLIONE.

To face page 130.

LETTER XVIII

IN THE PALAZZO PESARO, VENICE,
This 1st day of June, 1493.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY BELOVED AGNESE,

When you see the heading of this letter, you will indeed wonder what I am doing in Venice! It is a long story, but so much has happened since my last letter, that I must begin at the beginning and tell you all about it. It was with much indignation that you gave me full particulars of the League which the Duke Lodovico had entered into last April with the Pope Alexander, Venice, Ferrara, and Mantua. This was solemnly concluded on St. Mark's Day, April 25, when the Doge knighted the ambassador from Milan, after High Mass in the Cathedral; and the banners of the Pope, Venice, and Milan were carried in procession round the Piazza. As you pointed out, Naples was expressly left out of the alliance, which is almost a declaration of open war.

Upon this followed, on May 15, the Treaty made at Senlis, between the King of France and Maximilian the King of the Romans, a most unnatural compact, which I feel sure cannot last, and there ought therefore to be hope for Naples, what say you? But I must explain my coming here.

The Duke of Bari feels the immense importance of

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keeping Venice as a firm ally, though for my part, I believe that Republic is never to be trusted, but always waits to join the winning side. Lodovico did not himself venture to go to Venice, lest he should rouse suspicion in the minds of his other allies ; so his plan was to send his young wife, apparently on a mere visit of pleasure, but in reality to gain a stronger hold on the Doge and the Signoria, and learn their intensions.

It seems a strange mission for a girl of eighteen, but the Lady Beatrice was delighted at the prospect, and at once set about the most gorgeous preparations. It so chanced that at this moment one of her ladies-in-waiting fell ill with fever, and Polissena d'Este, who manages everything, came to me in despair, to implore me to take the place of the sick maiden. " We are only to be one week at Venice," she urged ; " but, indeed, I have great need of a lady like yourself, Violante, of strong character and supreme influence, to help me keep these frivolous damsels in order. Moreover, you will be doing excellent service to your own Duchess, for you will be able to give her certain knowledge of all that takes place."

I was taken by surprise, but, as you may suppose, I courteously refused, for I serve none but my own dear lady. However, the Duchess of Bari and Polissena so persuaded and argued with my own mistress, that it was she who insisted that, for her sake, I should accept this offer.

" I have deep misgivings about this Embassy, Violante, and your presence may be of the utmost value to my husband and myself," she said most earnestly. " At least, we shall no longer be kept in the dark, and, knowing the truth, we may take steps accordingly. You must go, Violante, with a brave heart, and show your mettle."

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Think of me, then, dear Agnese, in a new light. as one of the chief ladies in a gala show, next to the stern Polis-sena, who, for some reason best known to herself, is devoted to me. We are all to wear the most gorgeous costumes, and it has been quite a diversion for my Duchess to take care that I outshine all the other maids-of-honour. It was arranged that all our company was to go first to Ferrara, as Duchess Beatrice was to be accompanied to Venice by her mother and Madonna Anna Sforza. I was greatly interested in the ancient city, which was finely decorated in our honour; but the Castello of the Este Princes, standing foursquare, with its massive walls and corner towers rose-red in the sunset light, was the most splendid medieval castle I ever beheld. The Duomo too is beautiful, with St. George and the Dragon over the portal, while this same warrior saint, the patron of the Ferrara Princes, is to be seen everywhere in his shining armour. in pursuit of the mystic dragon.

The Duchess Beatrice wore that wonderful robe with the Genoa lighthouses, and was decked out like a jeweller's shop; and my Lady Anna, the wife of Prince Alfonso, vied with her in a robe of crimson and grey satin, half covered with a device in golden letters. But the most amusing part was that each Princess tried to outdo the other by the magnificence of her ladies-in-waiting. We had all been supplied with long gold chains, and the Court ladies of Ferrara at once obtained some rather more massive ones. Then the Lady Beatrice lent us strings of pearls for our *Paternosters*, and the other ladies followed suit with bigger pearls. This was not to be endured by the Duchess of Bari, who immediately had made for us ladies the most amazing mantles of

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green satin, with broad black velvet stripes, which we are to wear in Venice, with as many jewels as we can carry. During our stay in Ferrara, we had one round of amusements. Tournaments and horse-races, where we saw the famous Barbary horses of the Marquis of Mantua, a garden feast, and the inevitable Latin plays of Plautus in the evenings. Duke Ercole never thinks any reception complete without these.

It was on Saturday, May 25, that all the noble lords of the party went off to the splendid villa of Belriguardo, and we ladies—the Duchess of Ferrara, her daughter-in-law Anna Sforza, her daughter Beatrice—and a bevy of ladies-in-waiting, protected by the young Prince Alfonso, and four ambassadors from Milan, and accompanied by a suite of nearly twelve hundred people, set forth in fine Bucentaurs to sail down the Po as far as the Adriatic. We reached Chioggia on Sunday evening, and I do not think I ever saw anything more beautiful than that picturesque fishing village and the vast lagunes. We were hospitably entertained for the night by Venetian nobles, and the next day, after hearing Mass, Messer Cordier leading the music, we sailed between the islands in that marvellous waterway which takes us along the Lido towards Venice. The weather was at first very rough, but improved later. We passed the fort of Malamocca, in the entrance of the beautiful harbour, and we were welcomed at San Clemente by the Doge himself in his stately bucentaur, and after him came a brilliant crowd of gondolas and barges, adorned with gay-coloured flags and flowers. It was a marvellous scene which I shall never forget, and we had scarcely time to realize it before we were greeted with a great outburst of trumpets and fifes, and such a thunder of artillery from the arsenal

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and the fleet of Venetian galleys, that we were overwhelmed by a perfect tumult of rejoicing. The loggias on the Grand Canal were gorgeous with tapestry and flowers, as we passed on to the various palaces prepared for our reception.

We are lodged in one that formerly belonged to the Pesaro family, but was given to Niccolò II. d' Este for supplying the Republic with corn in the war with Genoa. From the balcony I had a magnificent view of the festal entertainments. There was one raft in which Neptune and Minerva were sitting with trident and spear, and they began to dance to the music of tambourines and drums, while from the centre came forth first an olive tree, and then a horse with other figures. Presently there passed a galley of armed soldiers with a Moor in the middle, armed with a spear and a shield, with the arms of Duke Lodovico. There were figures round of Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, and Wisdom, who made a fine show altogether. Next followed a most interesting procession of the Venetian Arts and Crafts. But I cannot tell you the half of the beautiful sights which seemed like a dream of romance. From all the balconies and windows hung with Eastern tapestries of that row of palaces on the Grand Canal, beautiful ladies of Venice, in robes of wonderful colours, looked down and smiled at our coming, while the bells rang, and the music sounded, broken now and again by the booming of the guns to welcome us.

The old Doge, Agostino Barbarigo, is a most charming and stately personage, and in his unique head-dress, and raiment of white and gold, he was the most magnificent figure in that great reception. Perhaps I ought to except the Duchess Beatrice herself, who was striking beyond

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expression in an amazing robe of gold brocade, covered with crimson doves, jewels and feathers combined on her dainty cap, and an enormous ruby hung on a chain linked round her neck with great diamonds and pearls. I did not see much of her on the voyage here, as Polissena had placed me in charge of the younger and more frivolous members of the suite on the larger Bucentaur; but I am told in confidence that she played cards all the way, and won a lot of money at *buttino*.

I have taken care that this letter shall be sent to you by a sure hand, so that I can freely tell you all I know about the negotiations. The crafty Venetians thought to find out privately the object of Beatrice's coming, and sent three gentlemen to interview her; but she was more than a match for them. She declared her intention of speaking before a full audience of the Signoria, and after politely inviting the envoys to hear Mass sung in her rooms, she dismissed them. Later, with the four ambassadors from Milan, she went on Tuesday, May 8, in state to the presence of the Council in the great Sala del Collegia. I was fortunate enough to be in attendance upon her, and was greatly impressed by her tact and cleverness. In the most modest and charming way, she laid her husband's memorial before the Doge, and made quite an eloquent speech, in which she pointed out that, as Regent of Milan, he was on the best of terms with both Charles VIII. and Maximilian, and that the sole desire of his heart was for the peace and greatness of united Italy.

She then called attention to the letter of Belgiojoso, the Ambassador of Milan to France, who gave full particulars of the Treaty made at Senlis, and finally, with the sweetest humility, begged the Signoria to advise the Lord Lodovico as to his future conduct.

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She looked so young and attractive, and she spoke so cleverly that she ought to have achieved a triumph. But that solemn conclave of wise old men only smiled upon her, and courteously assured the siren that they would consider the matter, but that first they must consult with Pope Alexander as head of the League. On the following Saturday, June 1, Beatrice was admitted to a more private conference with the Doge, but, alas ! I was not present, although I managed to obtain a very fair account of the conversation. The young Duchess alluded to some secret negotiation which her husband was carrying on with Maximilian, to gain for himself the investiture of Milan which, I must tell you, no Sforza Duke has yet obtained from the Empire. Then Beatrice carefully pointed out that Lodovico was the real ruler of Milan, and that all the castles and all the treasure of the State were in his hands. But once more she only received courteous and evasive answers, and the Doge made no offer to support her husband's desire for the actual title of Duke of Milan.

This is all I have learnt, my Agnese, but, indeed, it is more than enough, for I scarcely dare to dwell upon the dread importance of all this for my dear Duchess. Can I seek to keep her in ignorance of the worst, or is it my duty to crush all her faint hopes and reduce her to despair ?

It has never been my way to play the part of Cassandra with you, and if trouble comes, at least we will meet it bravely. Thus I turn from all dark forebodings of the future, which is ever full of unknown shadows and storms, to dwell upon this gay, brilliant present, all radiant with sunshine—Venice on a summer day. Listen to the story of this festal week, and try to think of me

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ever after, as a nymph in Arcady, careless and happy. We lost no time, for on the very morrow of our arrival, the sumptuous entertainments in our honour began. There were races on Tuesday, in the piazza adjoining the beautiful church of San Marco. We sat in the loggia of the great Campanile to watch them, and Beatrice bestowed the prize. On the Wednesday we had a most interesting contest of boats and gondolas, all gaily decorated on the Riva ; but on Thursday was the most triumphant succession of entertainments, all day long. We began by a delightful expedition, landing at the Rialto, and making our way through those paved streets of the Merceria, pausing to look at the stalls of silks and spices and rare merchandise, on our way to hear Mass at San Marco. We were welcomed with a blast of trumpets from the loggia, and the Doge himself came forth to meet us, and conducted the Duchess of Ferrara and her daughter to the high-altar, where they knelt down to make their confession. Afterwards they joined us in the seats prepared for us, and Mass was sung most beautifully, our singers from Milan joining in with great effect.

Then the Doge showed us the treasury, with its wonderful treasures of inlaid chalices and holy vessels, and the relics set in most precious jewels. But it was with the greatest difficulty that we managed to leave the beautiful church, for the people had thronged in vast crowds to catch a sight of the Princesses. We next crossed the piazza, which was very gay with the Fair of the Ascension going on—many curious things, but the most beautiful was the show of delicate glass vessels made in this city. In the afternoon, when we had dined, we were taken in decorated barges to the magnificent Palace of the Doge.

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where we met a noble company of Venetian lords and ladies, and were invited to join in the dance which was taking place. In the evening a kind of masque was performed before us, in which Justice sat enthroned in a fine chariot, with a drawn sword in her hand, bearing the motto "Concordia," and crowned with palms and olives. Behind her was an ox, a figure of San Marco, and an adder (in compliment to the descendants of the Visconti). It was all meant to be a symbol of the League. Then figures danced with golden balls, which broke out in flames, and an ox, a lion, an adder, and a Moor's head danced round the car of Justice.

When this was over, came the great banquet, where the dishes were brought in with a crowd of torches, to the sound of trumpets. The table was covered with gold and silver plates and cups, and the sweetmeats had most wonderful meanings. After supper, there were more dramatic shows which went on for hours, till the poor Bishop of Como fell asleep for very weariness, and we could hardly keep our eyes open. Will you believe, Agnese, it was nearly two o'clock in the morning before we reached home and went to bed? And to think that the generous Republic had spent a fortune on that wonderful succession of illustrated fables, which we could not keep awake to look at!

To my mind, the real enjoyment of our visit was in visiting the great churches and shrines, the tombs of the Doges, the beautiful pictures with which Giovanni Bellini has adorned the Santa Maria Gloriosa, and every nook and corner of the wonderful San Marco. We were taken over the great arsenal, and saw the armoury and the galleys in the making, all protected by the winged lions. We even climbed up to the top of the high campanile,

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and looked out over the lagoons, and had a good view of the gilded mosaic and the bronze horses, and the great red standards flying in the wind. On the last day of our stay, we paid a visit to the Queen of Cyprus in her beautiful gardens at Murano. It was here more than anywhere else that I longed for the presence of my dear Duchess. You know the pathetic story of this fair Caterina Cornaro? How the little maiden was brought up at the Convent of San Benedetto at Padua, chosen by the Signoria of Venice as a daughter of the Republic, and meet bride for the King of Cyprus, who sought their alliance; how the splendid Queen of Cyprus was cast down from her high estate, with the cruel loss of husband, son, and kingdom; how with heroic patience she endured all, and in the end her gentle endurance has brought her calm and peace for the evening of her days. May we all lay that lesson to heart! And so I, too, will make an end, with fondest love.

Your adoring sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XIX

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,

This 30th day of June, 1493.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY AGNESE,

How can I tell you my longing and regret as we sailed away from Venice, in the first glow of a summer morning, and I took my last look of that beautiful sea-girt city! Never can I forget those solemn splendid churches, the streets of palaces rising from their silent water-way, gay and sparkling with light, the dark gondolas gliding in mysterious haste, and all life one dream of joy and pleasure. Do not smile at my enthusiasm, for only those who have seen the city of the Doges can understand its nameless charm.

On our homeward journey, we passed once more along that shining highway of the sea, through the lagoons which seem to stretch to the horizon on the long, low, sad-coloured line where the sky bends down to Malamocca, smoothly sailing through the clear, quivering waterway, within the level stretch of island, only hearing outside the roar of the Adriatic. O that all sea-voyages were like this! After resting a night at Chioggia, we crossed once more those swampy reaches of the great delta of the Po, in the rude flat-bottomed boats always used for that shallow water, until we found the Bucentaurs awaiting us at the mouth of the Po, and continued our journey in propitious weather, back to Ferrara. Here we remained

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for a few days, and, while most of the royal party paid a visit to the famous villa of Belriguardo, I was glad to remain behind in the company of the Duchess Leonora, who was utterly worn out by the journey and the ceaseless round of festivities. She is so brave and cheerful that I do not think anyone notices how fragile and delicate she really is. She kept me with her as her constant companion—for we are both true daughters of Naples, and have so many friends and memories in common—and I learnt to know her as I have never done before. She talked freely to me of my dear Duchess Isabella, with much love and pity, and lamented the inevitable rivalry between her and her cousin Beatrice.

“As the daughter of my brother, Alfonso of Calabria, I have always been drawn towards Isabella as if she were my own child, and, as you know, Violante,” she assured me, “I have done my best to smooth her way. But you are clear-sighted enough to understand the truth, that the victory must always be to the strong. Do not be indignant if I say that Isabella’s husband is quite unworthy of her; that he is weak and foolish, incapable in every way of ruling a great State in these perilous days. His uncle Lodovico, who has been Regent so long, has every quality of a great ruler; he has the power entirely in his hands, and I do not think he will resign it. . . .”

“But, Madonna, surely this is unjust usurpation,” I ventured to interpose. “If the father is weak, why should the infant son Francesco lose his rights?”

“Forgive me, dear, if I speak my inmost thoughts of the poor child you love so loyally. Do you think the little fellow shows any sign of inheriting his mother’s strength of character and intelligence? Could his dearest friend desire for him the cares and perils of a throne?”

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In this moment of perfect confidence, let us be honest to each other. Do you believe that it would be for the happiness of the mild, gentle Francesco to be head of the State in a coming age of war and contest? For I *know* that dark days are before us all. I feel that I am worn out before my time, and perhaps the approach of death enables me to pierce the veil of the future. My spirit trembles before the coming doom of my own home and my own people, for Naples has no force to resist the might of a French invasion, which is steadily and surely coming upon us. . . ." The poor lady broke down into tears, unable to endure the vision which she had conjured up, and I could only depart in respectful silence, with the cry in my heart, "Can these words be true?"

Write to me, Agnese, I beseech you, and tell me that these fears are groundless; assure me that the citadels are well defended, that a large army will be raised, and that it will be well disciplined and well commanded. Nay, tell me that King Ferrante has made powerful allies, and that the French King will not venture to attack our Naples.

Our return to Milan was quiet and uneventful, save that we paused for a few hours at Revere, on the Po, to meet the Marchesa Isabella, who had come from Mantua to greet her sister Beatrice, and compare notes with her as to their successful and triumphant visits to Venice. When I reached Milan, I found my dear Duchess much improved in health and spirits, and it was with true pleasure that I learnt how she had spent the greater part of the time when I was absent. She had been persuaded by her confessor—a dear old man who was Gian Galeazzo's tutor, and watched over him like a father—to go into retreat in the Dominican convent, for the sake

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of her peace of mind. She had evidently revealed to him, in confession, the exceeding bitterness of her feelings, and the good priest could think of no better remedy than a deeper sense of religion, of trust in God and submission to His will. My dear lady told me of the quiet talks she had with the Abbess and with a certain Sister Osanna, who was on a visit there from her convent in Mantua, and filled with love and sympathy for the troubles of my Duchess, had promised to write to her in time of need. She must be very like you, Agnese, for it seems to me that she said exactly what I should have expected you to say.

I know that you are curious in such matters, but I can only tell you that it seemed to me no new teaching, but only the brave old truths so often heard before, yet never taken to heart, and which in the careless days of happiness and prosperity pass by unheeded. Sister Osanna had spoken of the perfect love of God, which for His sake gladly endures all things and rejoices in tribulation. "Put on the armour of faith, and be of good courage; seek true peace, not on earth but in Heaven, by meditation, where love Divine makes the heavy burden light, and as a living flame and glowing torch ever safely keeps its upward way. 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' Oh, happy loss, oh, happy suffering, which leads from the fading glories of this tempting world to the perfect life, which is being one with God! . . ." You will understand from my halting words how, maybe, the first seed of deep truths had taken root in the soul of my Duchess. But even my faithful love will scarcely excuse me for having drawn back, even for one moment, the sacred veil which shrouds from human eyes the spiritual awakening of a soul—I will say no more.

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With regard to matters of State, it seems to me that the plot is thickening on every side. The last event which concerns us is the marriage of Duke Lodovico's kinsman, Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro, with Lucrezia Borgia, the acknowledged and favourite daughter of His Holiness Pope Alexander VI. The young lady is said to be very beautiful, and she is quite young—only fourteen. The wedding has been celebrated with great magnificence in Rome, all the Cardinals being in attendance, and a dowry of thirty-one thousand ducats was bestowed with the bride. This is another link in the chain which binds together Milan and the Pope in close alliance. One of the ladies-in-waiting here comes from Pesaro, and she says it is a most beautiful place, in a broad valley open to the sea and protected by an amphitheatre of hills, in the very garden of Italy on that ideal shore of the Adriatic. Life in the ancient Sforza Palace, with country homes for the summer, such as the beautiful villa on Monte Accio with splendid views over land and sea, in grounds like the fabled gardens of Armida, ought to secure to the young wife, happiness and peace such as she has never known.

I have also just heard another still more important piece of news. In my last letter I alluded to the Embassy which the Lord Lodovico had sent to Maximilian to intrigue for the investiture of Milan. I now learn that the ambassador, Erasmo Brasca, had private instructions to offer the Lady Bianca Sforza as bride to Maximilian, with an immense dowry of forty thousand ducats. The son of the Emperor is always short of money, and this bribe was more than he could resist; but he desired that the matter should be kept secret for the present, as his father, Frederick III., is in ill-health, and not expected to

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recover. So there is another splendid alliance for the Lord Lodovico, with whom everything succeeds, and who will soon be the practical ruler, not only of Milan, but of the other States. And the Princess Bianca, after her two disappointments, will probably attain the highest rank of her family, and be one day Empress. Such are the ups and downs of life !

Meantime I spend long hours in these beautiful gardens of Pavia, with my dear Duchess and her children—our delicate little Francesco, whose need for constant care is another title to our love, and the beautiful baby girl Bona, full of life and spirits, a very joy to behold. She is the same age as the son of Beatrice, and is quite as fine a child, although she does not receive any of the fulsome flattery bestowed by the courtiers on the heir of the Duke of Bari, arbiter and ruler of Milan.

Write to me soon, Agnese, and tell me all the news you have, as this prospect of invasion is full of anxious fear—for our Naples above all.

Ever your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XX

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 24th day of October, 1493.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY AGNESE,

Your letter was indeed welcome, so full of hope and courage; yet I must own that I cannot feel that complete confidence in the Pope's alliance, with which he seems to have inspired King Ferrante. Can we place much trust in this proposed marriage between Don Gioffre Borgia and the Lady Sancia,* when we remember that only last June the Pope married his daughter Lucrezia to a cousin of Lodovico Sforza? It seems to me that he is careful to make friends with both sides. Still, the fact remains that he has thrown over the League, and takes part with Naples to oppose the French invasion, that Piero dei Medici of Florence joins him in this, and that Venice remains neutral, as usual. Ferrara has openly joined the French side, and I know that Duke Ercole is sending his second son, Ferrando, to take service under Charles VIII. This is how matters stand at present, but we cannot foresee events, and must hope for the best.

There is thus a very close bond between the Duke Ercole and his son-in-law Lodovico, to whom, as you know, he paid a long visit this last August and September at Pavia. The Duke came in great state, bringing with

* Illegitimate daughter of Alfonso, Duke of Calabria.

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him a goodly company, amongst whom was a band of young men to act in a series of those comedies of Plautus which he loves so dearly, and with these was that young poet Lodovico Ariosto, of whom I have spoken to you already. The young Prince Alfonso came with his father, but we were disappointed not to see his wife Anna, for she remained at Ferrara with her mother-in-law, Duchess Leonora, who was in failing health, although no one was aware how serious her condition was, even at that time. Never was there a gayer season at Pavia; hunting and card-playing and all kinds of entertainments, in none of which does my Duchess join except at the performance of the plays, and she does this out of compliment to the Duke Ercole and his actors. The visitors from Ferrara only arrived on August 25, and two days later we had the "Captivi" acted, really most excellently, although I cannot help thinking that it is a long and tedious performance. Still, to my mind, it is the most interesting of the Latin plays I know, and it was rendered with much attempt at realism, and with pleasing musical interludes. But you may have too much even of a good thing, and after we had sat for hours watching the "Mercator" the next day, and the "Pœnulus" on the third successive evening, I think you will own that our patience was strained to the utmost. But the interest which Duke Ercole took in these performances was un-failing, and his enthusiasm did much to promote their success.

It was while we were thus full of entertainments, that the news arrived of the death of the Emperor Frederick at his favourite residence in the Castle of Linz.* Although this event had long been expected, there was a general

* Frederick died on August 19, 1493.

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feeling of suppressed excitement as to what influence it might have upon affairs in Italy. Stately messages of condolence were, of course, sent to his son Maximilian King of the Romans, as he would still be called, although his attainment of Imperial power was inevitable. The Duke Lodovico could not conceal his satisfaction, for now the impending marriage of his niece Bianca would be openly announced, although his promised investiture of Milan might be kept secret for the present from the outside world. We can only hope that this alliance with Maximilian may in time detach Lodovico from the side of Charles VIII. Meantime the Duchess Bona is in the seventh heaven of delight, and considers that she has become of the highest importance, as mother of a future Empress. She is so gay, so friendly and condescending to us all, and so intensely engaged in reckless expenditure for her daughter's gorgeous trousseau, that she provides us with constant interest and amusement.

Duke Ercole is on excellent terms with Duchess Bona ; indeed, they have much in common just at present, as he is providing a trousseau for his young son Ferrando, who is to have everything of the best—horses, arms, plate, and, above all, the most splendid costumes, so that he may make a sensation at the Court of France. It is amusing to hear the discussions about the clothes, as his father has heard the fashion is always changing at Paris, and that the French in their attire use quieter colours than we do—black velvets, black silk and damask chiefly, with perhaps a jerkin of crimson silk to lighten it. It is a much more serious matter to settle about the escort and train, which is to be magnificent ; more so, indeed, than Duke Lodovico thinks necessary, for he suggested that forty horses and mules would be enough,

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but Ercole will not reduce the number below eighty. Another important point is the day when young Prince Ferrando should set forth on his journey. His mother the Duchess Leonora writes that the Day of San Francesco of Assisi (October 4) would bring a blessing ; but Lodovico insists that a " lucky " day must be chosen by his astrologer, Maestro Ambrogia, without whose consent he never selects any date for himself.

While thus pleasantly engaged about one son, Duke Ercole was overwhelmed with delight on hearing the welcome tidings that his younger son, Ippolito, a boy-priest of fourteen, who had already been appointed to a Hungarian Archbishopric, was now made Cardinal by Pope Alexander. But in the midst of the Duke's rejoicing, there came an urgent letter from his brother Sigismondo, telling him that the Duchess Leonora—whose ill-health had been almost forgotten amid so many interests—was now seriously ill. Her husband would have started home at once, but again Lodovico interfered with his astrology—" the conjunction of the moon would take place the day after to-morrow," he urged—and with fatal weakness Duke Ercole listened to his advice of delay. When he did start he made all haste, only pausing to meet his son Ferrando at Cremona and wish him God-speed on his journey to France ; but when the Duke reached Ferrara, on October 12, it was to hear the terrible news that his dear wife had passed away on the day before.* No one seems to have at all realized how dangerous her condition was, or her son would never have left her, and no persuasion could possibly have delayed her husband. I, who had seen so much of her after the visit to Venice, could never understand why

* Leonora died on October 11, 1493.



Photo, Anderson.

Dosso Dossi.

ERCOLE I. D'ESTE, DUKE OF FERRARA.

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her family showed no alarm or anxiety about the dear lady ; but as, in her courage and self-devotion, she never thought about herself, no one had any misgivings about her. To my dear Duchess it seemed as though she had lost her best friend, and the most powerful ally for her father Alfonso, to whom his sister Leonora Duchess of Ferrara had always been loyally devoted. Her gentle mediation for her brother and father at Naples is gone for ever.

How bitterly the poor Duke Ercole repented of his blindness, I know not, but he has lost his wise counsellor, his loving wife and faithful friend, and life can never be the same to him again. Her daughter Beatrice is more touched than I could have imagined from her thoughtless, self-centred character ; she remained in seclusion in her rooms for a week or two, with only the frequent company of her husband Lodovico, and his favourite, Galeazzo di San Severino his son-in-law. Her mourning is very complete—a robe of black cloth, with sleeves to match, and a very long black mantle, while on her head she wears a black silk cap with white muslin folds. I describe this carefully, because I hear that her sister Isabella has sent a special request to know whether she had contrived to give an elegant appearance to her heavy black. The news was hidden for a few days from the Marchesa Isabella, as she has at length hopes that her longing will be realized, and that a child will be born to her this winter.

I have already told you, dear Agnese, that my Duchess is looking forward to the same hope, which in her case is a matter of much anxiety, for there will be a great deal of fatigue and excitement about this grand wedding of her sister-in-law Bianca, and she is determined to play

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her part in the ceremonies in the most thorough manner. I shall have no one to support me in care and precaution, for the Duchess Bona can only think of one thing at a time, and all the intelligence she has, is completely engrossed with the pride and delight of so magnificent a marriage for her daughter Bianca, who has now reached the mature age of twenty-one years, and has already had two disappointments.

Think of us often, dear Agnese, and remember us in your prayers. The clouds are gathering around, and we know not what a day may bring forth. With most earnest wishes for your happiness, in this world and the next, I rest for ever,

Your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXI

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 5th day of December, 1493.

AL NOME DI DIO.

I scarcely know where to begin, my Agnese, in the account of this wonderful wedding, which far surpasses in magnificence anything I have ever seen. In the first place, I must tell you that we were all commanded to leave off our Court mourning for the occasion, and that the Duchess Beatrice had so far roused herself from her grief for her mother's death, that she resolved to have a new and astonishing robe made for the occasion. She therefore wrote to her sister Isabella to obtain leave to use a very beautiful design of linked tracery, which that universal genius Messer Niccolò da Correggio had invented for the Marchesa of Mantua. There was some correspondence between the sisters, but permission was given, and the splendid gown was made of purple velvet, with this new design carried out in solid gold, both on the robe and on the sleeves. It quite surpasses anything I have ever seen, for the trimming, which was set off with green and white enamel, was six inches deep on the front and back of the bodice, and the whole robe was lined with cloth of gold.

As we are on the subject of dress, I must tell you that my Duchess looked extremely handsome in a dress of crimson satin, looped up with gold cords. The bride

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herself wore a splendid robe of white and gold brocade with an immense train, a vest of crimson satin worked all over with gold thread, and simply covered with precious jewels. The sleeves were quite a new fashion, standing out like two wings. On her head she wore a crown of splendid pearls and diamonds.

After this frivolous description of finery, I must go back and tell the events in due order. On November 7 the two chosen ambassadors from Maximilian, the Bishop of Brixen, and Messer Jean Bontemps, arrived at Milan, and were received with great state at the Porta Orientale by the Duke of Milan and his uncle Lodovico, and escorted with the sound of trumpets to the rooms prepared for them in the Castello. They were feasted and made much of, and received costly presents while they awaited the day of the marriage, which was fixed for the last day of November. The city was decorated with rich tapestry and brocades, and myrtle, and ivy, and armorial bearings, while on the triumphal arch in front of the Castello, was placed the great clay model of Francesco Sforza on which our Leonardo has laboured so long.

The French ambassadors arrived just in time, and we all set forth in magnificent procession from the Castello, at about ten o'clock, the Lady Bianca riding in the triumphal car, drawn by four snow-white horses, and having on the right side my Duchess Isabella, and on the left the Lady Beatrice. Three other great ladies sat in the car, facing them, and all the Chamberlains, courtiers, and great men of Milan walked in front. The French ambassadors and all the envoys from Italian States followed, with the Duke of Milan and his uncle on horseback.

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Then came twelve chariots containing all of us ladies-in-waiting to the two Duchesses, dressed in tan-coloured robes and bright green satin mantles, and a goodly company of the noblest maidens in the city. We passed slowly through the streets, filled with admiring crowds, and when we reached the Duomo, we were conducted to our places behind the tribunal covered with cloth of silver, where the bride and her noble companions had taken their places, opposite the tribunal of gold brocade where the ambassadors of Maximilian awaited us. The Most Reverend the Archbishop of Milan in full vestments, with his attendant priests, celebrated Mass with great pomp to the music of the organ, accompanied by trumpets and flutes, and I never heard the voices of the choir sound more beautiful.

When the incense had been carried round and the Pax had been given, the newly-made Queen rose from her place and, accompanied by her nearest relations, advanced to the high-altar, while the ambassadors of Maximilian advanced on the other side, and as they stood there, the marriage service was read by the Archbishop. It was the Bishop of Brixen who gave the ring to the bride, and then joined with the Archbishop in placing the splendid crown upon her head, whereupon there was a great ringing of bells and blowing of trumpets, answered by the firing of guns outside. When all was over, we walked in procession to the porch of the Duomo, in the train of the Queen-bride, whose train was borne by one great lord, while two others supported her winglike sleeves. Then we all rode back to the Castello, while a *baldacchino* of white damask lined with ermine was held over the crowned head of Queen Bianca, whose long fair hair hung over her shoulders. This stately canopy was carried by doctors

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of the University in their robes of state, while we followed in procession according to our rank, on horseback, amid the cheering of the people and the sound of trumpets.

But the day's entertainment was not over, for the bride's splendid trousseau was on view in the state rooms of the Castello, and all Milan came to see it. It was of priceless value, for beside the beautiful garments and costly jewels, there were altar fittings and golden chalices, patens, and other vessels for her private chapel; gold and silver plate for table use; carpets, bed-hangings, tapestries, and mirrors; a great store of fine linen, saddles and horse trappings; and endless other precious articles. For two days there were feasts and tournaments, while at night there were so many torches and lights in the houses that all the city seemed to be on fire.

On December 3, the day chosen by the astrologer Messer Ambrogio, Bianca set forth on her journey to Innsbrück with a great company—the ambassadors of Maximilian, her brother Ermes, the Archbishop of Milan, Gaspare Visconti the poet, and others, amongst whom was Erasmo Brasca, who was to remain as ambassador from Milan to the Court of Maximilian. We all went in a body as far as Como, where we had a thanksgiving service in the Cathedral, and stayed the night—some in the Bishop's palace and the rest of us in various houses of the town. The next morning was the taking farewell of the bride, and Duchess Bona was the only one who wept—tears of joy and pride, I think, rather than grief. The Queen Bianca set out in a splendidly decorated barge, rowed by forty sailors, with the German ambassadors and the most important lords and ladies, while the rest followed in thirty smaller boats, to the sound of music and cheering of the river-side folk. They proposed to

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spend the night at Bellagio, but I shall be anxious for news of the journey, as we have had nothing but storms and tempests since our return to Milan.

My Duchess will miss the Lady Bianca, for although not so gentle and pleasant as her sister Anna, she was always a good friend to her. She has promised to write to us, and we shall look forward very much to her letters, as her life in that far-away land of Germany will be so different from ours. She much dreads the crossing of the mountains, which, I hear, are far higher and more desolate than those from Genoa to Tortona, which it was our fate to cross in the dead of winter also.

And now you will be anxious to know how my Duchess has borne all this fatigue and excitement, for she would play her part to the last moment, and joined in the final journey to Como. I am afraid that she will have to pay for it; but now that she is no longer needed, I have persuaded her to retire altogether from public life, and to take the rest so needful in her present condition. I hope shortly to send you good news, and meantime, my Agnese, pray for us.

Your devoted sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXII

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,

This 11th day of February, 1494.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY DEAR AGNESE,

You will already have seen the official announcement that "a daughter was born to the Illustrious Duchess of Milan." But I cannot tell you how thankful I am that the happy event occurred before my Lady Isabella received the news of King Ferrante's death.* You know how devoted she had always been to him from a child, and how the stern old man unbent to her in a way that he did to no one else. I greatly fear that his end must have been hastened by all the terrible anxiety and misery of these last few months, for I cannot forget those words of which you told me, in which he expressed his dark foreboding, with regard not only to the downfall of his own house, but of all Italy. "Never did the French come into Italy without working her utter ruin, though it seems to threaten only those who seek to defend themselves." May Heaven grant that this be not a true prophecy! At least, we may expect no half-hearted measures from the new King, Alfonso, as he has never concealed his feelings either towards the King of France or the Duke Lodovico. Yet this in reality does but make the situation more trying

* King Ferrante of Naples died on January 25, 1494.

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for my poor Duchess, to have her father in open warfare with the Lord of Milan—the arbiter of her husband's fate and her own.

But before we dwell upon this terrible strife, I must tell you about our sweet little baby-girl—a beautiful fragile creature, with a wistful, far-away look in her soft eyes. She is always in the arms of her mother when we can steal a quiet time to ourselves, and she is to receive the name of Ippolita, after her grandmother of blessed memory. We are now settled here at Pavia, in seclusion from the world, as the Duke Lodovico and Beatrice, with all their Court, have taken up their abode at Vigevano, and beguile their time very much, I hear, with hunting, until the time of mourning for the Duchess Leonora shall have expired. Duke Gian Galeazzo is with us here, and he finds it a constant grievance that he is not invited to join the gay throng at his uncle's Court. True, he has his own horses and dogs, and also his own companions, and can get as much hunting and hawking as he wants; but he has a curious fascination for being in the company of his uncle Lodovico, and seems never content unless he is following him about.

Agnese dear, I cannot hide the truth, which is now so plainly visible to everyone. The husband of my Duchess becomes more unworthy of her and a more cruel trial to her each day that passes. His manners have grown more rough and surly, his temper is quite beyond control, and—alas that I should have to say it!—he is frequently the worse for drink. My dear lady is most tender and pitiful with him, makes constant excuses to me and to herself about his health, which is certainly breaking down, and, with the most marvellous patience for a woman of her high spirit, she endures everything, even when

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he is so past all consciousness of manly feeling as to strike her, my darling ! Taught by bitter experience, she has given up all effort to urge him to assert himself and take his rightful position in the State, for she has learnt the utter hopelessness of advice or encouragement to one who blurts out everything she says, if not to Lodovico himself, then, in his absence, to any courtier or groom he comes across. It is heart-breaking ; and I can only watch her in silent love and admiration, for I can dimly perceive where she gains the strength for her heroic fortitude. Think of it, Agnese, the Illustrissima Duchess of Milan, in this magnificent Castello, surrounded by the most beautiful and priceless works of art, the daughter of a King, and the wife of a (reputed) reigning Prince, yet in such pitiful circumstances that she could only gain by changing places with the beggar woman at her gates.

I dare not dwell upon her sorrows. Did I not promise to give you news of our Lady Bianca and her wedding journey ? I told you the story until that December day, when we looked our last upon the bridal party, in their gaily decorated barges sailing across the blue waters of the Lake of Como, to the sound of music echoing over the water. I will quote from a letter written by the Queen Bianca herself to my Duchess.

“ We arrived in safety at Bellagio, and slept the night in fair comfort, at the Castle of the Marchese Stanga. But all too soon we had to set forth next morning under a black sky, and before we were far from the shore there came on a terrible storm, which drove the barges on all sides and nearly frightened us to death. My ladies cried and sobbed, and went down on their knees to pray God for mercy, and I verily believe the seamen

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were as much alarmed as we were. The only thing to be done, when the tempest abated a little, was to put back to Bellagio with my barge; and can I ever say how glad I was to see dry land? The weather was better next day, but it was wretchedly cold, and worse was before us, as we had to cross those terrible huge mountains, all covered with snow, the very next day. Our way was over that fearful and cruel mountain called Nombray,* starting from Gravedona, where I had to leave poor Lucrezia behind, for the hardships we endured had wellnigh killed her. Never in my life have I had such an experience, and I would die rather than go through it again. It was like riding up a steep wall of ice and snow, clambering over rough stones by the side of terrible precipices, where I had to shut my eyes not to see the horrid depths below, and sometimes a snowstorm beating down upon us. . . . Oh, my dear Isabella, I know you had a bad winter journey from Naples, but it was nothing at all compared to mine. And whenever I complained to Messer Brasca, he would say when I mounted my horse in the morning, 'It will be better to-day'; but indeed, I do assure you it was worse than ever. Not until December 23, almost Christmas, did we reach Innsbrück, a whole fortnight after we left Gravedona, and you may well believe that we were all more dead than alive.

"I had hoped to meet my lord and husband here, but he was detained at Vienna, and meantime his uncle the Archduke Sigismund, and the Archduchess Barbara, a nice, kind woman, did their best to entertain me. She gave a number of Christmas entertainments; we had plenty of dancing, and a variety of new games which

* Now the Stelvio Pass and road, 9,055 feet.

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I had never seen before. Next we amused ourselves in dressing up our ladies first in the Lombard fashion, and then the Archduchess would see how mine looked in the German style, and I can assure you we laughed. Ambrogio de Predis, who was travelling with us to paint a picture of the Lord Maximilian, has just finished a very pleasing likeness of the Archduchess Barbara. So you see, we find something to pass the time until my lord and husband can arrive. . . .”

This letter was broken off abruptly, but it seems to me that the King of the Romans does not show any undue haste in arriving to welcome his bride, whom he has never yet even seen. We can only hope that he will be gentle and kind to the young Princess, who is rather childlike in some ways, and not very brilliant, and who must feel lonely at first, so far away from her own people. It does not seem quite kind to say so, but of course we all know that Maximilian was tempted more by the immense dowry than by the bride, who is thirteen years younger than himself. They say that all the love he had to give was bestowed upon Mary of Burgundy, the bride of his youth, and the mother of his son Philip and his daughter Marguerite.

I have recently heard from a lady-in-waiting of the Marchesa Isabella of Mantua, who says she is secretly much disappointed that her long-hoped-for first child should be a girl, and after being married four years !

Everyone seems to have expected a son and heir, and there were magnificent preparations for the event. A splendid cradle was sent by Duke Ercole of Ferrara, but Isabella refused to allow her father's gift to be used for a mere daughter. The child is to be called Leonora, after her grandmother, “ that her name and blessed

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memory may live again," says the Marchesa ; and for her sponsors she is to have the Duke and Duchess of Bari, Lorenzo di Pier Francesco dei Medici, and the Doge of Venice.

For my part, I cannot help thinking that a little daughter should be warmly welcomed, for she is likely to be much more of a joy and comfort to the mother than a boy, who would so soon be taken out of her care and given over to tutors and other Court officials. I believe that my Duchess feels as I do, though indeed she loves all her three dear little ones with the warmest devotion, and is never so happy as when she is with them.

Tell me more about yourself, dear Agnese, when you write to me ; you think so much of everyone else that you forget how I long to hear all that concerns you. What would I not give for one peaceful hour again with you, to clasp your hand and look upon your dear face . . . and hear your voice once more. When will this come to pass, my Agnese ?

Ever your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXIII

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,
Despatched this 12th day of June, 1494.

AL NOME DI DIO.

I have this moment, dear Agnese, received your letter of May 8, written on the very day of the great ceremony of King Alfonso's coronation by the Papal Nuncio, Juan Borgia. This is indeed good news, and I cannot tell you how rejoiced my dear Duchess was to hear that her father has been thus openly recognized by the Pope. We are now so secluded from Court life that even important news take some time to reach us, so that from you first came these tidings, so full of hope. It proves that the Pope has been induced openly to declare his alliance with King Alfonso, and you also tell me that he has addressed a Papal Bull to the King of France, warning him not to invade Italy, or it will be at the peril of his soul. I have great doubts whether Charles VIII., although he is called "the most Christian King," is pious enough to be much moved by this, but in any case the opposition of the Head of the Church must have some influence in discouraging his allies.

Poor little Princess Sancia! So her marriage has actually taken place with the Lord Gioffre Borgia. We can only trust that her husband will be more worthy of her than we could expect from the Borgia family, and at least she may pride herself upon being another Iphigenia,

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sacrificed for her kindred and her country. I am glad she came to wish you good-bye, for I am sure you will have spoken words of comfort and wise advice to her.

Still I fear that, with all these warlike preparations both by sea and land, in which you say the King is so eager, there is no hope of peace, and war between Naples and Milan may be proclaimed at any moment.

We gather that Duke Lodovico's brother, the Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, who did so much to promote the election of Pope Alexander VI., and who has hitherto been the ruling power in Rome, is now completely out of favour, and has retired to his country villa, where he spends much of his time in hunting — so I heard from a friend who has recently arrived here from Vigevano, where Lodovico and the Lady Beatrice temper their mourning with great parties for the chase and hawking, in which they join with great energy. I think that my Duchess misses her riding and outdoor life more than anything else, but she only has anything of this kind when her husband rouses himself from his weary lethargy and takes some mad freak into his head, for she never opposes him now in anything and is his constant companion—when he does not drive her imperiously from him that he may enjoy himself most unwisely with his wild companions. But the Lady Isabella never complains, and even seeks to excuse the poor Duke to me and to her old confessor, Gian Galeazzo's former tutor, who now lives in the Castello entirely, and is a great help to us all.

You will be interested in a letter which the Count Galeazzo San Severino has written to a courtier here from the French Court. Duke Lodovico sent him by special desire of Charles VIII., who wanted his advice about many matters of war ; for I do not know how it is,

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but this Messer Galeazzo has a way of making everybody believe in his superior knowledge on all subjects. He seems to have been received with great honour, and to have made a very good impression. April 5 was the day which the astrologer Messer Ambrogio had chosen as a lucky day for the entrance into Lyons, for, as you know, Lodovico will have nothing done without his permission! To obey orders, San Severino had to enter the town secretly, in disguise, and see the King privately on that day, for the next had been arranged for the public entry, when he was to ride through the streets with a splendid company of a hundred horsemen. He was then openly received by the King and Queen, to whom he had brought magnificent presents from Duke Lodovico, of matchless horses, robes, inlaid armour, and silver vessels full of costly perfumes, in which I hear the French greatly delight. Duke Ercole, I know, sent the French Queen grains of musk and horns of civet by his son Ferrando.

Nothing would serve the King but that Messer Galeazzo should ride in a tilting match, to show off his horsemanship before the Court, and His Majesty could talk of nothing else. He actually made him a Knight of the Order of St. Michael, and even received his visitor in his private apartments, and introduced him to the fairest ladies in the land, with whom they all sat and had merry talk for hours. There seems to have been another arrival at Lyons, the Cardinal della Rovere,* who joined with Messer Galeazzo in inflaming the King's mind and urging him on to the invasion of Italy.

This letter has been delayed by the difficulty of finding a trustworthy messenger, and now (June 12) all my

* Afterwards the warrior Pope, Julius II.

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worst fears have come true. It is terrible to know that open war has been declared between Naples and Milan, that King Alfonso, the father of my Duchess, has been the first to break the peace, hollow as it was. We have certain news that when His Majesty rode in state to the Cathedral on the Feast of Corpus Cristi, he showed his disfavour to the ambassadors of Milan, and they were suddenly dismissed a few days later. They have brought word that a fleet is being prepared in the Bay of Naples to attack Genoa, and that the troops of King Alfonso have already joined those of the Pope. There is even a rumour current that Duke Lodovico's Principality of Bari has been taken possession of by the Neapolitan army.

Never have I seen my Duchess so distressed and alarmed, for the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII. is now an assured fact, and from all we hear, the French army is infinitely superior to any force the King of Naples can raise. You know how devoted the Lady Isabella is to her father and brother, that gallant young Prince Ferrante, and she sees in this coming war the destruction of her house. It is in vain that I try to comfort her, and talk of the uncertain fortune of battle, of the great mountain barrier which the French will have to cross—my words have no power to touch her. Even when I lure her into that pleasant garden where her babes spend long hours in the grassy shade, and try to distract her with their engaging wiles and sweet, innocent play, I cannot succeed in lightening the heavy gloom which weighs down her spirit. It seems to me, Agnese, that it is easier to bear with fortitude the most painful blow, when it has once fallen, than to endure the long fear, and anxiety, and waiting.

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And for you, my Agnese, who never take thought for yourself—what will all this coming war mean to you? I cannot endure to think of you, in your helpless condition, in the midst of the horrors of a siege. At least promise me this: that before the danger draws near you will seek a safe refuge in the Convent of Santa Chiara, in the midst of your dear friends the Franciscan nuns. I know you will only smile and say that you are safe anywhere, but for our sakes, indeed, you must incur no risk.

Was there ever such a broken, distracted letter as this? But you will understand and forgive, and ever remember us in your prayers. I cannot tell if you will receive this or any of my letters, now in time of war, but you may trust me to send a messenger whenever the chance occurs.

And now farewell, with my unchanging love.

Your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXIV

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,
This 15th day of August, 1494.

AL NOME DI DIO.

I have no means of knowing if my letters reach you, dear Agnese, for it is now many weeks since I have heard from you. These long summer days seem to creep on at a snail's pace, so full are our hearts of suspense and anxious longing. My Duchess is given up more than ever to the care of her husband, whose condition varies from one of feverish excitement and wild freaks of strained exertion, to a dull, settled despair, from which no loving devotion can rouse him. My lady's gentle patience with his boorish ways and her ceaseless efforts to amuse and distract him, are a continual marvel to me.

The idle life of amusement and dissipation which has been studiously encouraged during so many years by his uncle Lodovico, for his own political ends, is bearing terrible fruit, for poor Duke Gian Galeazzo has now sunk into a fretful invalid, to whom trifles are of supreme importance. One moment he will suffer an attendant to take undue liberties with him, and the next he will fly into a passion and shamefully abuse the unfortunate man. Happily for us, the Duke's chief favourite is a certain Dionigi Confanerio, a thoroughly trustworthy, good servant, who is devoted to my Duchess and helps her as much as possible. He never fails to ask her per-

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mission before bringing the Duke's dogs and falcons, by his order, into the private apartments. . . . But I will not weary you, dear, with all these petty details of our sad life. I am thankful to say that, with all these worries and the haunting anxiety with regard to her father and brother at Naples, my dear Duchess bears up wonderfully, and her health has not given way.

Now I will set down everything that reaches me in the way of news, although it may be ancient history before it meets your eye.

Our boasted mountain barrier has failed us, for the first advance guard of the French army, under the Duke of Orleans, appears to have crossed the Alps without much difficulty in fine summer weather. There is no love lost between this Prince and Duke Lodovico, for Louis of Orleans claims the Duchy of Milan as grandson of Valentine Visconti. He is actually in possession of Asti, part of her dowry, so close to the territory of Milan as to be a constant menace. It was at Alessandria, near this city, that Lodovico went to meet the French Prince on July 13, to decide the plan of campaign, and he was required to advance sixty thousand ducats to help with the naval defence of Genoa. You told me some time ago that this port was to be attacked by the fleet of Naples, under King Alfonso's brother, the Lord Federico. I had a long letter from my friend Lucrezia, in Duchess Beatrice's household, and she told me what excitement all the ladies were in at the coming of the Duke of Orleans.

It seems to be the French fashion for these Princes to kiss all the maids of honour, and she tells of a merry jest spoken by Barone, the Court jester. "Mark my words, when the Duke has kissed Polissena d' Este, he will

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have had enough of it, and will go no further.” However, Louis of Orleans seems to have had more pressing affairs, as he went straight from Alessandria to Genoa, and from thence to defend Porto Venere and Rapallo, with the help of troops from Milan. I think you know that the Duke of Ferrara has promised to allow the French forces and those of Milan to pass through his territory on their way to Naples. Well, I hear that he has already had great cause to regret this, for the first five hundred Italian soldiers, under the Count of Caiazzo, Galeazzo San Severino’s eldest brother, so cruelly ill-treated the people on his way, that Duke Ercole has written a most indignant letter to Lodovico, bitterly complaining, and demanding compensation for these outrages.

This is welcome news, as the only hope for Naples seems to me in the quarrels of her foes. And yet I may be mistaken, for not long since my Duchess showed me a letter full of gallant confidence and spirit from her young brother Ferrante, who is now Duke of Calabria, though it seems strange to call him by the title which has been so long familiar to us as that of his father. The young Prince spoke confidently of the fleet sent to attack Genoa, and seemed to build great hopes on the alliance with the Pope and with Florence. Alas ! all this will soon be put to the test, for we hear that the main body of the French army, with the King at its head, is already preparing to cross the Alps.

With regard to our present isolated position at Pavia, there is one matter which is a constant grievance and hardship to my poor Duchess. You know how generous and open-handed she is, how liberal in her charities, and how eager to reward all who render her any service ? Now all this is practically at an end, for she has no control

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of money ; all our household expenses are regulated by the Lord Lodovico, and to him even the Duke of Milan's steward is alone responsible. Thus it so happens that we are supposed to live in the midst of luxury, but in reality it is often difficult to obtain the merest necessities of life. My Duchess cannot humble herself to complain and to beg from her uncle that which is her due, and thus it comes to pass that, in the middle of apparent magnificence, she is reduced to absolute poverty, in that she has nothing to give to her accustomed charities, or even to satisfy the just claims of her dependents. When you come to think of it, this is a heart-rending position for a great Princess, even for one who has advanced so far in the path of self-denial that she is willing to sacrifice all her own personal desires. . . .

I had reached this point in my letter, and was sitting idle and overcome with sad thoughts, when, to my joy and surprise, I was roused by the coming of a letter from you. It had been long delayed on the way, and the messenger had made his way through many perils and hairbreadth escapes ; he had reached Pavia at length in the disguise of a Jew pedlar, hawking strange remedies, and ointments, and golden dyes for the hair. . . .

This is indeed wonderful news, my Agnese ! How strange that the same thought should have occurred to me and to your old friend the Mother Superior of Santa Chiara—that in these days of anxiety and danger it would be well for you to find a safe refuge in that peaceful convent. Of course, I understand how the sudden illness of our old nurse Maria, who has tended and watched over you all these years with such devoted care, made some change absolutely necessary. But when you tell me how the infirmaries sisters were able to move you, to

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have you borne all the way through the city in a litter as far as the Strada Trinità Maggiore, and that you were none the worse for it, but are actually strong enough to be carried out into that beautiful convent garden, it seems to me little short of a miracle ! Is it possible, my Agnese, that our Maria, in her exceeding devotion to you, has kept you too quiet and passive all this time, and that if you had been compelled to use your limbs and do things for yourself, you might not have lost all power ? But why do I ask this, for the past is no longer in our hands ? Enough for us if, by the mercy of God, the future is so full of hope and promise. When you are no more an absolute prisoner on your couch or in your chamber, what splendid possibilities of a new life may be before you, my sister ! Surely we shall all meet again when these storms of war and cruel oppression are over-past.

I write in haste, for my " Jew pedlar " waits to carry back my letter with one from my Duchess to her father the King, and so farewell, my beloved, till our happy meeting.

Ever your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXV

*To the honoured Lady Agnese da Canossa, in the Convent
of Santa Chiara.*

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,

This 17th day of October, 1494.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE CARISSIMA,

I must begin by telling you all the Court news and the whole story of the long-expected coming of this King of France, for if I were first to dwell upon our own anxiety and sorrow, I should never pass beyond.

Even in your peaceful convent you will have heard that Charles VIII., with his great army, has crossed the Alps, and that this threatened invasion of Italy is now an accomplished fact. Amongst his finest soldiers, I am told, are the archers from Brittany, the crossbow men, the Swiss pikemen, and the French men-at-arms, with their lances. Early in September the King reached Asti, and was welcomed with great state by Ercole, Duke of Ferrara, who presented him with splendid tents and pavilions, and by the Lord Lodovico, who paid him the most lowly homage. As if this were not enough, the Duchess Beatrice hastened at once to the Castle of Annone, near Asti, with a chosen choir of musicians and singers, and a magnificent suite of eighty attendant ladies in gorgeous robes. This apparently gave great pleasure to the King, who has a very special taste for female



Photo, Alinari.

In Uffizi Gallery.

CHARLES VIII., KING OF FRANCE.

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beauty, and when he paid his state visit to the young Duchess, he first kissed her and that pretty child Bianca, San Severino's wife, and then all the other Court ladies one after the other ! I only wonder that none of them rebelled, for he is said to be an ugly little man, with a big nose, a wide mouth, and a deformed figure. However, he appears to have made much pleasant talk and stayed the whole afternoon, first asking to see the ladies-in-waiting dance, and then actually having the audacity to request a dance " in the French fashion " from Beatrice herself ! I wonder whether any other royal Princess would have been flattered to be treated like a dancing-girl ; but Beatrice was so eager to please him that she danced before him, like the daughter of Herodias before Herod. This was in her lord's Castle of Annone, and on this occasion, Lucrezia tells me that she wore a robe of green satin, the bodice covered with precious stones, and the sleeves very tight, but slashed, to show the white chemise under ; her throat naked, with only a big pearl necklace and ruby pendant. On her head was a red velvet cap, with a tall aigrette of feathers and more jewels.

But I must tell you that the day before, Beatrice and more than twenty of her ladies had already ridden over in splendid style to call upon the King in his lodgings at Asti, but even he seems to have been surprised, and made some excuse for not seeing them. However, he was no doubt much impressed by the beauty and liveliness of the young Duchess, for he gave orders that her portrait should be painted and sent to his sister, the great Anne de Beaujeu, at Moulins.

A splendid entertainment had been prepared for the following day, after that visit to Annone, but the French King fell ill of some strange complaint, which was at first

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supposed to be smallpox, and the Duke of Bari sent his astrologer and physician, Ambrogio da Rosate, to attend upon him. King Charles was in bed for a fortnight, and it was a very dull time for his courtiers and the French leaders, who complained bitterly of this inaction in the sultry heat of the plain, while the soldiers grumbled most at the sourness of the wine with which they were supplied. It is quite true that our last vintage was not good, but surely our Italian sun must ripen the grapes much better than in any French vineyard! Nothing could have been more propitious for our dear Naples than this enforced delay, and I hear that Lord Lodovico could scarcely hide his impatience and anger. However, the foolish young French King was in no hurry, for even when he was well enough to travel, early in October, he suffered his army to march on to Piacenza, while he himself went to stay with the Duke and Duchess of Bari at Vigevano for another week's amusement. Yet King Charles must have something of the cautious temper of his father, Louis XI., for with all his show of genial confidence in his host, I am told that he insisted upon having the keys of the Castello brought to him at night, while his special guard kept strict watch at the city gates. He had not forgotten the story of Péronne!

But no misgivings prevented his having a splendid time of festivity. There were stately banquets and great boar-hunts, and every entertainment which could be devised to put the French lords in good temper.

I have kept my promise, dear Agnese, and told you all these frivolous Court news, until I have now reached the critical moment of the King's visit to Pavia. Lodgings had been prepared for the royal party in the city, as no doubt Lodovico wished, if possible, to prevent any meet-

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ing between our poor Duke of Milan and King Charles, who is so near a kinsman—his first cousin—as Madonna Bona was the sister of his mother, Queen Charlotte. But this plan was defeated, for the King was suspicious of some plot, and made a formal request for rooms in the Castello. Our presence here could be no longer hidden, and my Duchess, with her little Francesco, received the royal visitor at the portico of the Castello, and informed him of her husband's serious illness. The King was most courteous and considerate, promising to pay a visit to his cousin, who is now entirely confined to his bed.

However, the subtle policy of Duke Lodovico and his wife Beatrice had provided endless entertainments for the King, who was taken to see the great farms, in which he was much interested, and to spend a day at the Certosa, where the monks showed him all the new buildings and gave him a splendid banquet. There were gay hunting-parties on other days, and every evening plays were acted, or there was music and dancing. My poor Duchess was in despair, fearing that the hoped-for interview with the invalid would never take place ; but the King seems to have insisted, for yesterday, his last evening, he came to the sick-room, with Lodovico, who no doubt accompanied him to prevent any intimate revelations. I was not present at the tragic scene that followed, for all the attendants were dismissed from the chamber, and I only gather what took place from the broken story of my dear Duchess. The King appears to have been full of sympathy, and spoke most kindly to the Duke Gian Galeazzo, trying to cheer him with hopes of recovery, and promising to send his own physician, Messire Théodore Guainiero, to see him. The sick man

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was much touched and pleased with his cousin's friendly words, and, sending for his little son, earnestly commended the four-year-old child to his powerful cousin. In the presence of his uncle however, he could not enter into details, but my Duchess, seeing that this was her only chance, threw caution to the winds, and, casting herself on her knees before the King, implored him to have pity upon her father the King of Naples, and her brother Ferrante. The King seems to have been moved by her tears, and he did his best to console her, but was forced to add that he could do nothing to stop the invasion of Naples. The fortune of war must take its course, and was beyond his control. It was with some indignation that my Duchess told me of his flattering words about her youth and beauty, and his conventional advice to her to pray for herself and her husband.

Yet indeed, on thinking over this last counsel, I wonder if he had not meant to convey a warning to her ear. Agnese, I am distracted with fear and anxiety, and it seems to me that all hope for us is at an end. The King departed on his way this morning, after assisting at Mass in the chapel of the Castello, and all chance of help from him is at an end. He kept his promise and sent his physician to see the Duke late last night; but my Duchess, who hung upon his words with desperate eagerness, could learn very little from him. He examined the invalid carefully, and spoke of the immense importance in these complaints of a most careful diet, repeating the words several times. New-laid eggs and boiled milk he specially recommended, and impressed the necessity of constant watching upon my dear lady, who scarcely ever leaves his bedside, and then only to give place to his mother, who makes a devoted nurse.

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What will be the end of it ? I ask myself again and again. One secret piece of news, which by some strange chance has leaked out, adds to my misgivings. I have certain information that the long-delayed investiture of the Duchy of Milan—which Duke Lodovico bought from the King of the Romans, Maximilian, by the immense dowry of his niece Bianca—has at length reached him, and Lodovico is only biding his time to make it public, and openly assume the title of Duke of Milan, of which he has long enjoyed all the real authority. Forgive me, dear, if I am so full of our trouble and anxiety that I have not yet told you how constantly you are in my thoughts, and how it comforts me to think of you in that peaceful convent in the midst of loving friends. Pray for us, my Agnese, for indeed I fear that no earthly help is of any avail in this dark hour.

Your loving sister till death,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXVI

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,

This 23rd day of October, 1494.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY AGNESE,

The blow has fallen, and we are crushed with desolation. Evil rumours travel quickly, and the report of the death of the Duke of Milan, on the morning of October 21, will have already reached you. We were all aware of the serious nature of his illness, but there seemed to be no immediate danger until after that painful interview with the French King, when there was a sudden change for the worse. The Duke was conscious of it himself, and some instinct of coming separation made him cling to his wife and keep her ever by his side, as though she alone could protect and save him. It was a time of agony for my poor Duchess, who was assailed with questions which she dared not answer.

“What hope did Niccolò da Cusano and the other doctors give of his recovery?” “Surely his uncle Lodovico loved him too dearly to leave Milan at such a time if there were cause for anxiety?” “When would he be well enough to go out hunting again?” The unfortunate lady tried to speak soothing words; then, in her tortured perplexity, a sudden inspiration came to her. and she sought me in the antechamber, where I was always hovering about in the hope of serving her.

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"Violante," she sobbed, "go and bring the children to see their father. It may be their last chance."

"Yes, Madonna dear; it is a beautiful thought," I replied eagerly, and hastened forth to do her bidding. As I had expected, I found the dear little ones at play in the sequestered corner of the gardens, near the old sundial, where the tall cypresses stand like sentinels on guard. Francesco and Bona ran to meet me with a cry of joy, for I think they love me next to their mother. Even the babe Ippolita held out her arms in welcome as she sat on the knee of my lady's own nurse, dear old Anna. A few whispered words explained to her my mission, but it was with a feeling of awe that the two elder children heard that they were to see "dear father." "May I bring my kitten?" asked Francesco; and I gladly agreed, thankful for the diversion.

My darlings were quite hushed and subdued when we reached the great hall from which the sick-room opens, and we found their mother anxiously awaiting them. She took the baby-girl from the arms of her nurse, and bade Francesco and Bona follow her, to say "Buon giorno" to their father. I watched them timidly draw near to the great state bed, with its crimson hangings, the little boy clinging to his braver sister, who led the way, as usual. They made a lovely pair, the dear children, in their dainty suits of green brocade, for my lady would always have them in princely dress. A smile passed over the sick man's troubled face as he caught sight of the children, and his thin white hand reached down to stroke the curly head of the boy, who still held the tawny kitten tightly clasped in his arms.

I drew back into the outer hall, for this pathetic scene was too sacred to be watched by alien eyes, and the more

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so as only my dear Duchess realized that it was a last farewell. It seemed only a few minutes later when the little ones joined us, radiant with delight. Francesco had been promised a big drum, the desire of his heart ; while Bona gaily lisped that “ one day soon father will take me a-hunting, and hold me tight on his big horse.” But it was in trembling silence that my Lady Isabella gave back the *bambino* into old Anna’s arms.

All that morning the poor Duke was very restless, and disturbed by fits of depression, from which he would rouse himself to bid those around him take note that he made a vow to give dowries to a hundred poor maidens, on his recovery. But when later, his wife had been persuaded to take the rest which she so much needed, and to leave him for a time, the Duke’s mood changed. He sat up in bed, and, angrily complaining that he was being starved, he ordered that fruit and wine should be brought to him. This was against the doctors’ orders, but he was so violent that the attendants dared not disobey their lord’s command. They brought him luscious pears and rosy apples, of which he partook with the greed of a hungry man. They brought him wine—rare old Falernian—and twice the silver beaker was filled to the brim. Then he fell back half-unconscious on his pillow ; violent sickness followed, and once more he was racked by agonizing pain. . . . Niccolò da Cusano, who had been summoned in haste, gave orders that a messenger should be sent at once to the Lord Lodovico, with tidings that his nephew was dying.

My Duchess was roused from the deep, heavy sleep of utter exhaustion by this alarming news, and it was only by her gentle persuasion that her husband was induced to take the soothing draught prepared for him.

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After this, he slept for a time, while she kept her vigil by his bedside, not daring to move, for her hand was clasped in his. The Duke woke refreshed, and asked for his favourite servant, Dionigi, of whom he eagerly inquired about two horses which his uncle Lodovico had recently sent him. He desired to see them, and the honest fellow lost no time before bringing them into the great hall, where his master could have a good view of them through the open door. Gian Galeazzo was delighted with their appearance, and made the groom lead them about to show their paces. Then he turned to Dionigi with a smile, and said : “ My uncle must love me well to think of me so kindly. You must thank him for me, and tell him how much I admire the horses. He would never have left now if he had not been obliged to wait upon the King, would he, Dionigi ? ”

“ No, indeed, my Lord Duke,” was the man’s hasty reply, with a deprecating look towards his mistress.

Agnese, I cannot tell you how pathetic it was to hear the dying Prince speak with such trusting affection of one who had always been his evil genius, encouraging his folly and weakness, and then robbing him of his birthright. My Duchess turned away her face to hide her tears, but she spoke no word of protest. The poor lady had learnt her bitter lesson in the hard school of suffering. She knew that it was now too late for revolt and self-assertion, that peace and charity and forgiveness were the only meet handmaids by a death-bed.

Exhausted by the passing excitement, Gian Galeazzo sank back on his pillows, and presently, after taking some slight nourishment from the hand of his wife—a raw egg in broth—he fell asleep again. But his face was so drawn and deathlike that my lady bade me seek the

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priest, his old and devoted friend, and pray him to be in readiness for the last offices. When the Duke awoke, an hour later, he was quite calm and conscious, and willingly consented to make his confession and receive the parting rites of Holy Church. But when this was over, he roused himself the next moment, and told Dionigi to fetch his greyhounds; . . . and they came, the great beautiful creatures, rubbing their heads against their master, and licking his hands with eager affection and almost human understanding. It was a touching sight to watch the dying man caress his pets and talk to them of coming happy days together, for even then he could not realize his condition.

When after a while, the Duke fell asleep again, Dionigi would have taken away the greyhounds, but my Duchess made him a sign to leave them in the room, lest the sick man should miss them on waking. I could not help thinking of those former days, when the poor lady had complained that her most private chamber was turned into a dog-kennel, and I marvelled at the miracle wrought by love and pity.

Never shall I forget the slow-creeping hours of the long night which followed, when, at the request of my Duchess, I kept silent vigil by her side. In the great dim space, lighted only by flickering candles, strange mysterious shadows seemed to move about, and I could almost fancy that I heard the rustling wings of the Angel of Death. The only break in that oppressive, haunting stillness was when one of the waiting physicians would enter softly, and take a long look at the sleeping figure, half hidden by the heavy brocaded curtains of the bed. There was no change until the dawn was near at hand, when a warning message was sent to Madonna Bona.

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who soon hurried in with dishevelled hair, a mantle hastily wrapped round her portly form. It was all that we could do to control and hush her intemperate distress, for, in spite of the alarming symptoms, she had obstinately refused to believe in her son's danger. But now there was a look upon the Duke's face which none could mistake, and as the first rays of morning light poured in through the open window, he passed quietly away.

Until all was over and her husband had gone beyond the reach of her tender devotion, my Duchess bore up with splendid courage; but the strain had been too great, and in that first hushed moment of bereavement, I caught her in my arms as she sank unconscious. We carried her away to her own room, while the air rang with the loud, tempestuous grief of the Duke's mother, who was always like a child, poor thing! in her want of self-control.

In this hour of despair and desolation I can write no more. Agnese, weep for us.

Your ever-loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXVII

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,
October 29, 1494.

AL NOME DI DIO.

When I last wrote to you, my Agnese, it seemed as though the gates of life had closed behind us, and the world itself had come to an end. Alas for my poor Duchess ! When the care and skill of Messire Niccolò had called her back from that deathlike trance, we dreaded the moment when she would awake to the stern reality of her widowed estate, her lost position, her ruined hopes, and all her pomp and glory cast down and levelled with the dust. But for the present our fears were vain, as full consciousness was long delayed. My dear lady was laid to rest in her great darkened chamber—hastily hung with funereal black, where of late had been cloth of gold—and she took no heed, but turned her face to the wall, in silent, unapproachable despair.

Her spirit seemed to have passed into some far-away region where our words of love and entreaty could not reach her ; she made no sign, she would touch no food, and for days her precious life was trembling in the balance. Then I took a bold resolve. “Tears might save her,” the wise physician had said. I brought the children in their black, funereal mourning to her bedside, and I threw open the windows that the full sunlight might fall upon their frightened faces. Roused by that dazzling

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glare of light after the sepulchral gloom, my poor Duchess made a restless, startled movement, and raised her eyes as though the gates of Heaven were open before her, and she beheld the radiance thereof. But it was no angel's voice which broke that hushed silence. "Madonna, my dear mistress," I began in clear, distinct tones, "before you leave this sad earth for a better world, I pray you tell me your last wishes for these poor orphans, robbed at one blow of father and mother. Would you have them remain here under the protection of your uncle Lodovico, or shall I travel with them to Naples and place them under the care of the King, your father?"

In a moment I saw that my cruel words had pierced the mist which enshrouded her. She turned towards me and made an effort to rise on her couch, with upraised hand to shield her eyes from the blaze of light; and the pitiful group of her poor forsaken darlings flashed upon her consciousness. She held out her arms towards them, and cried aloud: "My children! No one shall take them from me. My uncle will never have them while I live, and Naples cannot protect them. Give me Francesco, my Duchetto!" she added in a broken, eager voice; and as the boy was lifted to her embrace, she burst into a flood of merciful, healing tears.

Thanks to God, her gallant warrior spirit was roused at last, and she was saved to us. But hers was a sad awakening to a hard and bitter world. From the first, we could hide nothing from her keen, incisive questions, which pierced through all our feeble efforts to soften the fatal truth. As soon as the children were gone and we were left alone together, she had to be told that on the very day of the Duke's death her uncle Lodovico had received the news by a swift courier, had left the French

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King at Piacenza and hurried back, first to Pavia and then on to Milan. Here he lost not a moment before calling a meeting of the chief magistrates and citizens. . . . At this point the Duchess interrupted my story.

“ Was it to proclaim my son Francesco, the rightful heir, Duke of Milan ?” she asked, in bitter irony.

“ Madonna, he did indeed suggest your son’s name, when he informed the Council of Duke Gian Galeazzo’s death ; but the Chamber was full of his own friends, who loudly called upon the Lord Lodovico to become their Duke and Sovereign Lord,” I replied, anxious to give the Prince his due.

“ You are very simple, Violante, if you do not see that this was all a deep-laid plot, and that the Lord Lodovico’s words were but spoken in cruel jest and mockery !” was the indignant rejoinder. “ Let me hear the rest of your story.”

Then I told how Lodovico was proclaimed Duke of Milan by acclamation, and the very next day came forth from the Rocca clothed in a gorgeous mantle of gold brocade, with the ducal sceptre and sword borne in state before him, and how he rode all round the city for the space of two hours, with the ambassadors of Florence and Ferrara by his side, to the martial sound of trumpets, while the people shouted, “ Moro ! Moro ! Duca ! Duca !” and the bells of the churches rang peals in his honour for three days. My Duchess listened in silence to this confirmation of her worst fears, and I was in mortal terror lest she should sink back into that former state of dull despair, when a new thought struck her. “ Am I right in supposing that our loving uncle makes great profession of love and sorrow, and that he has written to every Court of Italy letters of grievous lamenta-

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tion for the death of his ' dear nephew ' ?" she asked, in tones of bitter scorn.

I could not deny that this was exactly what had taken place, and that he had also spoken publicly of his " incredible grief " at this sudden bereavement. By this time, my lady had taken wine and light food, and was recovering from her extreme weakness, but I was startled by her next demand. " Bring me a mantle, Violante . . . I must look upon his face once more." She would have risen from her bed, but in utter dismay I could only murmur that it was too late, for on the very day after his death the Duke's body* had been borne with all honour to the Duomo of Milan, where he was lying in state before the high-altar, clad in his sumptuous ducal robes and cap, while the people flocked to pay a last homage to their dead lord.

" By whose authority was this done in such haste ?" was her imperious question, although too well she knew what my answer would be.

She repeated my words with scornful accent. " The Lord Lodovico ! Yes, Lord of Milan ! Lord of Heaven and earth he thinks himself now ! Yet I maintain that there is a God in Heaven above, who will one day claim the penalty of such unbounded pride. What will my Lord Lodovico do next ? Will his grasping ambition ever be satisfied ?" All her high spirit of old was in this passionate cry, but her frail body was no meet habitation for a soul so dauntless. Faint and exhausted, she sank back on her pillows, and when I had ministered to her need, I left her in silence and darkness, to still the fierce tumult within and to regain her strength and fortitude.

It had been my unhappy lot that I, who loved her with

* Which had been first carefully embalmed.

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so deep a devotion, should be the one to pierce her heart with a sword. I have been tortured with wondering whether I was too outspoken that day, and whether I might not have gently paved the way for such fatal revelations. Yet I cannot greatly blame myself, for I have never hidden anything from my Duchess, and our affection is built upon perfect trust.

Late that evening I found her chamber empty, and some instinct bade me seek my mistress in the little oratory adjoining. There I found her on her knees, prostrate in supplication and, seen in the dim light, she might have been a Dominican nun shrouded in her long black mantle. In that silent moment while I stood watching, not daring to move lest I should disturb her devotions, there came to me a deep understanding sympathy for the terrible ordeal through which her proud spirit was passing. Would she learn her hard lesson—that the days of strife and contest were over, and that she was no longer called upon to fight like a lioness for the rights of husband and son? The end had come, and in the final overthrow of her fond hopes, she would school herself to see the hand of God, and to learn submission to His will. With an aching heart, I stole away from that lonely battle-field of a brave human soul, where none could help.

When I was summoned to the presence of my Duchess the next morning, I found her calm and resigned, but upon her brow there was a stamp of grief outlived: at three-and-twenty she had said farewell to her youth for ever. The costly mourning we had procured for her was laid out by her maidens on the couch by her side—the fine black camlet robe, with silk and muslin folds, the flowing lawn veil, the gloves, and all that was needful. My lady pointed to them and shook her head.

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“Take all this away, Violante,” she said; “and, as you love me, go into the town and buy me a widow’s dress—a long, plain, black habit of rough cloth, such as is worn by the poorest of our people, and a heavy veil of some coarse stuff to hide my face.

Without a word of demur, I made haste to do her bidding, for surely only sackcloth and ashes could do justice to so desolate a widowhood. Everywhere in the streets of Pavia I saw signs of mourning, and “Lutto Popoli” written in most of the windows; and then I remembered that on that very day, October 29, the Duke’s funeral was to take place in Milan. On my return to the Castello, I found that the Duchess had already given directions to her husband’s faithful servant, Dionigi, to her secretary, Paolo Bilia, and others, to attend the solemn ceremony; while, if we could not be present in the flesh, we could at least join in spirit, for a funeral service was held at the same hour in the chapel of the Castello. The orphan children, by their mother’s side, looked on in wistful ignorance, but the little “Duchetto,” Francesco, complained aloud of the ugly black clothes worn by himself and everybody else, and of the sombre hangings.

We had a full account of the funeral from Messire Paolo, who told us how the Prince, his master, was laid to rest in the tomb of his ancestors with the greatest pomp and honour. All the Princes of his house, all the great nobles and Court officials of Milan, were present, robed in black, as were the people who came in immense crowds, together with a great company of priests and friars. The whole of the spacious Duomo blazed with torches and wax candles until it was as light as day. The funeral oration was given with great eloquence and

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fervour by Giovanni Pietro Suardo, a friar from Mantua, and many were moved to tears by the touching story of that young Duke cut off in his prime.

Was not this gorgeous ceremony, my Agnese, a fit close to the mock reign of eighteen years, during which poor Gian Galeazzo had been Lord of Milan only in name? With this pictured pageant of imaginary greatness, I will bring my long letter to an end. and so farewell, my beloved,

Ever your fond sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXVIII

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

Despatched this 7th day of December, 1494.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MY AGNESE,

I have shown your most welcome letter to my Duchess, and she bids me thank you from her heart for those words of tender sympathy and comfort, of which there are some she loves to read again and again. What a change must have come over her if she can feel : " It is good for me that I have been humbled in the dust. . . . " " I turn to Thee, Lord God, Heavenly Physician of souls ; Thou only canst heal my wounds. . . . " Or, again, if such words as these can appeal to her : " Be not greatly troubled with the affairs of this world, but seek refuge in the inner sanctuary of your heart, the Kingdom of God within you, where Christ may find a worthy dwelling-place, and hold sweet converse with your soul. . . . "

Yours has ever been the precious gift, my sister, of finding " balm in Gilead " for the afflicted.

Now I must tell you, as you so earnestly entreat, all that has happened to us. The Lord Lodovico lost not a moment, but the very day after the funeral he left Milan and hastened to the King of France, in his camp close to the old city of Sarzana. Having achieved his end, he can afford to seem generous and, by his wish, four of the chief magistrates of Milan came hither to the Castello

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to seek an audience of my Duchess. First, they duly presented their condolences on the untimely death of the late Duke, and then made petition to the Duchess Isabella, in the name of the Duke Lodovico and the people of Milan, that she would deign to return to the Castello in that city, and take possession of her former rooms. In courtly language they expressed their affection for her, and promised that she and her children should be treated with all due respect and honour. My dear lady thanked the councillors most graciously for their friendly mission, and promised that she would consider the matter and send a reply. In her softened mood I am sure that she was really pleased with this attention, for presently, when the embassy had departed, she sent for her secretary, Paolo, and dictated to him a letter to her uncle, in which she expressed her gratitude for this offer, and also for the kind messages which she had received from his wife, the Duchess Beatrice.

Late that evening, she talked long with me on the subject of this removal to Milan, and I quite agreed with her that in many ways the Castello there was more convenient and central, while it was also much warmer in the winter for the children. My poor Duchess would have more friends there, would receive news and letters sooner, and would not be so lonely and isolated as at Pavia. But she cannot yet bear to face a journey or meet strangers, and all thought of it must be put off for the present. It is well, indeed, that she should have a refuge assured, for the tidings you send me prove that she would not be safe with her father at Naples, and that my dear lady has no choice but to bend her proud spirit and accept for herself and her children the protection of the new Duke of Milan, her deadliest enemy.

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I am told that King Charles is much touched by her troubles, and has spoken earnestly to Lodovico on behalf of the widow and orphans of his unfortunate cousin Gian Galeazzo. He caused a solemn Requiem Mass to be held in the Duomo of Piacenza in memory of the dead Prince, and gave alms to the poor for his sake. But all this was soon forgotten in the French King's triumphant progress through Italy and his astounding success, of which the news may not have reached you in your peaceful convent, where I thank Heaven that you are safe and at rest with the dear Sisters. Without a blow, Florence has thrown open her gates and yielded up six of her strongest fortresses to the French, Siena and the Papal States have made no defence, and now the way to Rome is open before them.

Duke Lodovico is becoming alarmed at this triumphant progress, as indeed he may well be, for the French conquests are a constant menace to him while the Duke of Orleans still urges his claim to Milan as heir to the Visconti. He has returned to the Castello, having left the camp in disgust when King Charles refused to give him the fortresses of Sarzana and Pietra Santa. The cowardly submission of the rulers of Italy passes my understanding. I have seen a letter from Florence in which that new prophet, the Friar Savonarola, who has so great a following there, calls the "sacred mission" of the French Cyrus a judgment upon our country, and foretells terrible things! Surely the present is sad enough. My poor Duchess was overwhelmed with grief at the news that her gallant young brother Ferrante had been twice defeated in battle and forced to retreat. The deadly peril of this invasion to her father and brother, and to her beloved home, haunts her night and day.

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I have no safe means of forwarding this letter to you, and it is growing into a diary as I add to it day by day. We have had a visitor here at Pavia : the Lady Chiara Gonzaga, wife of the French General, Gilbert de Montpensier. She is sorely troubled about this terrible war between her native Italy which she loves so well, and France, the land of her adoption. She brought many friendly messages from her sister-in-law Isabella, Marchesa of Mantua, and was full of kind sympathy for my poor Duchess, whom she strongly advised to delay no longer her journey to Milan, as change of scene would be so good for her. So at length it was decided that we should travel here on December 6, and I must tell you all about our journey. The taking leave of a home so full of memories was less trying than I had feared, as we shall return to the Castello of Pavia for the spring and summer, only spending the winter in Milan.

Closely veiled, in her coarse, heavy mourning, my Duchess sat in the big state chariot with the nurses and the dear children, who were full of eager delight and served to beguile the tediousness of that cold weary ride through a dreary plain, beneath a wintry sky. We paused to rest at the wonderful Certosa, where we were most hospitably received, and then, continuing our journey, we had passed Rogoredo, and were about two miles from the city, when we were met by the Duchess Beatrice, who had driven out to meet her widowed cousin. She at once left her own chariot and joined my Duchess in hers, tenderly embracing her with many tears. They rode on together until they reached the Castello, where Duke Lodovico advanced on horseback to receive them at the entrance of the gardens, courteously taking off his cap and speaking friendly words of welcome. Then, he on

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one side and the Lady Beatrice on the other, they accompanied my poor lady to her own rooms, which had been carefully prepared for her, and were all hung with black. Their hearts must indeed have been touched with pity to see her so pale and worn with grief, for they sat down by her side, and spoke kind words to comfort her, praying that she would dry her tears and look upon them as dear friends to herself and her children.

With the memory of all that had gone before, it was difficult to think that they were not acting a part, and yet I really believe that for the moment, the Duke and Duchess were sincere, while as for my poor Duchess, she bore herself with such sweet humility and gentleness as would have touched a heart of stone. As the Duke's courier is about to start for Naples, I will wait no longer, but hasten to send this long-delayed letter to you, my loved Agnese. Remember us in your prayers.

Your faithful sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXIX

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 16th day of February, 1495.

AL NOME DI DIO.

My Agnese,

We are distracted with anxiety as courier after courier arrives in the city, each one the bearer of more terrible news than the last. The whole story of this French invasion is indeed so strange and incredible that it sounds like some wild nightmare. Could anyone have believed that this young King, all untrained in arms, should thus make a triumphant progress through our land, every city and stronghold yielding to him without a blow? What has become of our armies? Where is the old warlike spirit of our Princes? Who is to blame for the shameful surrender?

We hear that the "Most Christian King" reached Viterbo on December 10, and from thence defied the Holy Father, that fierce and resolute Pope Alexander VI., who meekly endured the insolent presence of the conqueror in the Eternal City for the space of a whole month, while he and his Cardinals took refuge in the Castello Sant Angelo! King Charles seems not only to have dictated terms of peace, but to have expressed his wish to reform the Church. I must tell you that, on hearing this, Duke Lodovico made the satirical remark: "He had better first reform himself!" Indeed, the Duke



Lucas van Leyden.

EMPEROR MAXIMILIAN.

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is so much alarmed at the success of the French, that all his pretended affection for their King has changed to bitter hatred. He was bitterly indignant when he heard that the time-serving Pope had taken a most affectionate leave of the young King Charles, tenderly embracing him as the "eldest son of the Church," after bestowing on him the crown of Naples, which he was setting forth to conquer with his sword.

At the present moment, Duke Lodovico is much troubled by a persistent rumour which has mysteriously spread, to the effect that he had compassed by poison the death of his nephew Gian Galeazzo. It has, of course, reached the ears of my Duchess, but she never speaks of it, while on the other hand, her mother-in-law, the Duchess Bona, has no such reticence, and openly declares that her son was done to death. The Lord Lodovico so strongly resents her suspicions, and the mischief she has made in letters to her daughter Bianca, wife of the Emperor, that he has just requested her to give up her rooms in the Castello, and to take up her abode in the Corte Vecchio, the ancient Sforza Palace close to the Duomo. Madonna Bona is furious, and cannot say enough against her brother-in-law, which is unwise, as it will surely make life in Milan impossible for her. She showed me a long letter from her daughter Bianca, who, notwithstanding her high estate, does not seem to have a very happy time in her great, gloomy castle at Innsbrück, where she sadly misses her once gay, sunny life at Milan. Her husband, Maximilian, is kind but indifferent, and is very little with her. She asks for many things to be sent to her : gold brocade, white velvet from Lyons, a heron's plume, a ball of musk and other scents and perfumes. Also she wants portraits taken of all her

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relations, and especially asks for a likeness of my Duchess Isabella, her sister-in-law.

Poor lonely lady ! I do not wonder that she longs to see the familiar faces around her, in the cold, dull grandeur of her high position. She also alludes privately to a letter which Maximilian has received from her uncle Lodovico, in which he strenuously denies that there is any truth in the widespread rumour of his having poisoned his nephew, the young Duke of Milan. He vows that "nothing could be more contrary to our nature than such a crime." Concerning this painful suspicion, Agnese, I will only say that if I do not believe it myself, it is not that I think the Duke incapable of any crime to satisfy his ambition, but because I know with what constant, loving care that precious life was guarded by a devoted wife.

I remember, dear, that in one of your letters you said that in the convent they look to you for all the latest news of Milan, and that the nuns, in the peaceful round of their secluded life, dearly love to hear a little Court gossip from me, so I will tell you all about the recent great event here. You may have heard that the Duchess Beatrice was expecting the birth of another child. Her sister Isabella, Marchesa of Mantua, came here on January 19 to be with her at the time, and soon after her arrival, she paid a most kind and friendly visit of condolence to my widowed Duchess. She was received in the great bedchamber, all hung with black, and could scarcely restrain her tears at the sight of her poor cousin, so thin and worn with grief, in her coarse, heavy mourning. At her request, the children were sent for, and the Marchesa was much struck with little Bona's bright, charming ways, baby as she is ; but she could not take

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her eyes off our dear Francesco, and declared that she had never seen such beauty, "like an angel." She has only a daughter as yet herself, and is pining for a son and heir.

We may credit her with a passing pang of envy when, on February 4, her sister Beatrice became the happy mother of a second boy, a very fine, healthy child, on whose birth, I need hardly say, there were great public rejoicings and festivities by the Duke's command. The Lady Isabella held the babe, her nephew, at the font, where the young Prince was endowed with fifteen high-sounding names, from which those of Francesco Sforza were chosen for common use. Amongst other noble guests on this occasion, were Alfonso d' Este of Ferrara and his charming wife, Anna Sforza, who is always glad to come back to her old home, and who was welcomed with warm affection by my Duchess. The two sisters-in-law were dear friends in the old happy days, and Anna was so greatly attached to her brother, Gian Galeazzo, that her sympathy and warm interest in his children were a great comfort to my dear lady.

You will be interested to hear that, by special invitation, my Duchess paid a private visit to the mother and babe, and that she took me with her. It was most touching to see how my Lady Isabella could put aside her own sorrows for the moment, and with what sweet unselfishness she could share the joy of her cousin Beatrice, who was radiant with happiness and proud beyond measure of her two splendid boys. On the gorgeous magnificence of the chamber, hung with brocades of incredible value, the bed-hangings of cloth of gold and mulberry satin, the golden cradle and priceless treasures displayed, I will not dwell, as I described this splendour

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so fully when the first son was born. It is wonderful to me, with what patience and resignation my poor Duchess endures the constant series of festivities in honour of this event, which go on by night and day here, and make life in the Castello like one continuous fair. In her secluded chamber of mourning, my lady is constantly distracted by sounds of music and dancing, while if she draws near to the windows, it is to see gay cavalcades of lords and ladies in gala costume, riding forth on excursions of pleasure. There have been also splendid dramatic representations, in one of which was given the fable of Hippolytus and Theseus, and that queer little man, Serafino of Aquila, improvised verses, and sang them divinely—so I am told for, of course, I share the complete and gloomy seclusion of my mistress, although I have many friends, and they give me full accounts of all that happens.

The Duchess Beatrice has lately appointed a beautiful young lady-in-waiting, of a noble family in Milan, by name Lucrezia Crevelli; she is a very bright, gay young creature, and is greatly admired. There is even a whisper that she has attracted unusual attention from the Duke Lodovico himself; but we must trust that this is only one of the unfounded rumours which have a way of spreading at Court.

Farewell, my Agnese.

Your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXX

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
Despatched this 1st day of March, 1495.

AL NOME DI DIO.

I have no letter from you, dear Agnese, and my Duchess is worn with anxiety at receiving no certain news from Naples, although the vague rumours which reach us are full of disquietude and alarm. It grieved me so much to see how her fears were aggravated by the dreary seclusion of her mourning, which shut her out from the world, that I have persuaded her to accept the respectful invitation of the painter Leonardo, to watch him beginning his work on the mural paintings in the Convent of Santa Maria della Grazie. We have been there privately each day this week, and the great artist has told us about the work he is just beginning, and has shown us his rough designs for the wonderful "Last Supper," which is to cover the whole of one side of the Dominicans' refectory. This will be a task of unfailing delight to him if he is suffered to continue it, and not constantly interrupted by Duke Lodovico to make roads or buildings, or figures for masques, or even to finish that immense statue of Duke Francesco on horseback.

My Duchess is greatly interested, for Messire Leonardo loves to talk about his ideas, which are very beautiful, and to show the studies in his sketch-book ; and, above all, to listen through the open door to the music of the organ,

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and the solemn chanting of holy psalms by the deep voices of the monks. He says that pleasant melody is a help to his art. I cannot tell you what an interest and charm these visits to the convent have brought into the life of my dear lady.

But I must turn from these peaceful themes to sterner subjects, for a messenger has just arrived with news that King Charles is approaching Naples at the head of his army, and the startling rumour that King Alfonso has resigned the throne of Naples to his son Ferrante !

Can you realize the grief and despair of my Duchess at this fatal abdication of her father ? She insists that nothing but failing health can have induced him to take such a step—he the hero of Otranto, who has won such fame in battle ! She has written pitiful letters, imploring for one word to calm her anxiety, but in these troublous days no courier is safe. . . . I will add to this, day by day, and await my time for sending it.

Wednesday, at Noon.—Our worst fears are justified, but, of course, this is no news to you, who are on the spot. The messenger vows that he was an eye-witness, and that he has ridden night and day with the tidings. He says that before the French army had reached Naples, young King Ferrante retreated to the Castello del Uovo, which was protected by five warships, having first placed strong garrisons in all the fortresses. The next day he joined his father in the Island of Ischia, while King Charles entered Naples in triumph and, after this bloodless victory, was solemnly crowned in the Cathedral. Such are the bare facts, as they reached us, of a heart-breaking tragedy to my poor Duchess—the ruin of her house, the conquest of her home and country. She could only repeat again and again : “ My brave Ferrante, my dear brother,

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has fled ! It is impossible that he should so desert his post. Violante, say that it is false !”

Then nothing would content her but the courier must be brought to her presence : she would hear the story from his lips. Our faithful Dionigi went in search of the poor man, who was so exhausted by the tremendous ride, that only a princely guerdon could have induced him to obey the summons. He assured us the French army was of such overwhelming force that resistance would have been utterly useless, and could only have resulted in a brutal sack of the city. The people clamoured loudly for surrender, and even the Neapolitan soldiers had lost all heart and were deserting on every side.

Eagerly we questioned the courier, and, heavy with slumber as he was, we learnt from his words that the French army had entered without disturbance or bloodshed, and that strict discipline had been maintained in the streets, while the convents and churches were protected by a strong guard. For this assurance I was indeed thankful ; to know that you, my Agnese, were safe, and that your peaceful life would remain undisturbed, was an unspeakable relief to my anxiety.

But my poor Duchess would listen to no words of hope or comfort : one despairing thought alone filled her soul—that her loved brother Ferrante was responsible for the ruin and downfall of her house. Her distress was so heartrending to witness that at length I boldly spoke out my mind, and took her to task. “ You tell me, Madonna, that this bitter lamentation is for the lost honour of your brother Ferrante. But for my part, I hold that the saving of his own fame and glory is not the whole duty of a King. His subjects should be his first

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care, and if he is convinced that resistance is absolutely hopeless, my hero can at least spare his helpless people the unspeakable horrors of a place taken by storm, and given up to a brutal soldiery for massacre and outrage. Remember, Madonna, that this is a personal contest of two rival dynasties for the throne of Naples, and it will be the interest of King Charles to make his reign peaceful and prosperous. When I think of my sister Agnese safe in her convent shelter, from my heart I bless the gallant young King Ferrante, who saved his city from bloodshed and destruction, even at the peril of his own honour."

"Ah, Violante, you have spoken that fatal word!" exclaimed my Duchess, who had listened to me with growing impatience. "Had my Ferrante died in defence of his birthright, I could have mourned him with less bitterness."

I listened in mute dismay. Had I wasted my breath and my passionate arguments only to be met with this weak denial? Then my spirit rose to one final effort. "Madonna," I cried, "surely this dramatic death of King Ferrante which you seem to demand, would have been dearly bought at the price of a city in flames, of ruined homes, of peaceful citizens cruelly murdered, of women and children put to nameless torture? For a brave man like your brother, a soldier's death on the ramparts would have been an easy escape from the claims and duties of kingship. Nay, I will agree with you, that the cries and lamentations of a despairing populace, would have been drowned in the world's cheap applause for the King who chose his own standard of honour and fame, rather than the salvation of his people."

There was a long silence, only broken by low sobs, but

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before my Duchess spoke again, I knew that she had conquered her fierce pride of race, and that my poor words had not fallen upon barren ground or cost me her friendship. Henceforth her natural sorrow would be cleansed from all bitterness. Taught by a deeper sympathy, she would learn to take a broader and, at the same time, a more lowly view of life.

The ways of Providence are past finding out. Thus, had events taken their expected course, the Lady Isabella, born a Princess of Naples, would in due time have become the sovereign Duchess of Milan, and enjoyed a life of splendour and luxury. Yet God so willed it that on this earth she should have no continuing city, but remain a pilgrim and a stranger until the hour when He shall bid her become a denizen of Heaven. You will remind me that the gates of Paradise are not stormed in a day ; that many a weary conflict, many a sharp reverse and wounds unnumbered must first be endured. . . . Yes, but the victor's crown pays for all in the end.

Forgive me, dear Agnese, if I have taken a leaf from your book, if I have ventured to teach where I am but a faltering learner, and ever love

Your faithful sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXI

AL NOME DI DIO.

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
Begun this 2nd day of March, 1495.

CARISSIMA AGNESE,

No words can speak my joy on receiving your letter, so anxiously awaited. The story you tell me is indeed marvellous ; I had almost said beyond belief unless, like the dear nuns, I look upon it as a miracle. You say that when the news came, like a thunderclap, that the French army was at the city gates, and all was terror and confusion in the Convent of Santa Chiara, you actually rose from your bed without help, and that later, a startled novice found you kneeling in Our Lady's Chapel, on the altar-steps. When I think of those long years of patient endurance during which you were chained to your couch by deadly weakness, a hopeless invalid, given up by the most learned physicians, I cry out in utter amazement at the sudden recovery ! What miracle, indeed, gave you the will-power and the strength of body to rise and walk ?

Will this endure, my Agnese ? I ask myself in trembling hope. Is it possible that this great joy, for us, may spring forth from the national disaster like a flower amid ruins ? As I read your letter again and again, I find but little trace of the dismay and excitement natural

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to the dwellers in a beleaguered city which has fallen into the hands of the enemy. I am indeed amazed at the calm tone with which you look upon this occupation of Naples as but a passing cloud, for in your sequestered convent you can have no knowledge of the storm of furious rage and consternation which the French King's success has aroused throughout all Italy; and the anxiety is shared by Maximilian, King of the Romans, and the King of Spain, while even Venice is startled out of her usual selfish neutrality. I am told that at the very moment when the bells of Milan were pealing to celebrate the French King's victory, and Duke Lodovico was sending messages of congratulation to Naples, he assured the Venetian ambassadors that he was ready to join the Republic at once in open war.

The presence of the Duke of Orleans so near us at Asti, with his avowed claim on the Duchy of Milan, makes this a personal matter of more importance to Duke Lodovico than to any other ruler. From private information, I know that he has been moving heaven and earth to form a League strong enough to drive the invader from our land.

My Agnese, I cannot tell when this letter will reach you, for these are indeed perilous times for the unfortunate messengers. I have only just heard that the last courier sent from Milan was stopped at the gates of Naples, all his despatches were seized, and he himself was hung as a spy by some over-zealous guards. I will therefore write down day by day, all that comes to my knowledge, and send this diary at the first safe opportunity. It is curious how fully the reports which reach us seem to justify your prophetic remark that the French occupation of Naples would prove "but a passing cloud."

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All the former allies of King Charles, with the exception of Florence and Ferrara, have been secretly plotting against him, and have now joined the League of which I spoke. I must tell you the whole story of this, as we have learnt it from the Bishop of Como, who was sent as ambassador to Venice. This important treaty was signed late at night, on the last day of March (1495), in the chamber of the Doge, that grand old Agostino Barberino. It was signed by the ambassadors of His Holiness the Pope, Maximilian King of the Romans, the King and Queen of Spain, and the Duke of Milan, while the Doge wrote his own name in trembling characters on the parchment. The whole plot had been kept so secret that when it was openly announced the next morning to Commynes, the French ambassador, it came upon him like a thunderclap. My Duchess was more amused than I have seen her for many a day when the Bishop of Como told of Commynes' dismay, and his faltering question, "But what will become of my King? How will he be able to return home?"

"There will be no difficulty if he agrees to our terms," was the dry reply of the old Doge, who felt no respect for an ambassador who could so betray his feelings.

"As for me," said the Bishop, with a smile. "I, of course, expressed the affection and sympathy of my master, while I accompanied Commynes in his gondola as far as his lodging by San Giorgio Maggiore, there parting from him in the most friendly way."

"Then you think, Monsignore," asked my lady, "that the French King had no thought of any danger all this time that he has been feasting in my father's palace, in those fair halls hung with our priceless tapestries, on tables laden with ancestral gold and silver plate—

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above all, revelling in those rare and lovely gardens, where I ever walk in my dreams ?”

“ *Madonna eccellentissima*, ” was the courtly reply, “ your exquisite city of delights has proved another Capua to those northern barbarians and their King. They have lost all the martial ardour they possessed, in revelling and luxury, so that you will watch them fall an easy prey to our Italy, now that she is roused. Believe me, they will never see France again.”

These words greatly comforted my poor Duchess Isabella, whose heart is set upon the restoration of her brother to his throne, now that her own ambition has been crushed in the dust. The Bishop had much to tell us about the rejoicings at Venice, the feasts and the fireworks, and also of the solemn proclamation of the League, in the Piazza of San Marco, on Palm Sunday, the stately procession of ambassadors, and the presentation of the Golden Rose by the Pope to the representative of Venice.

Duke Lodovico is so full of triumph that he has taken courage to send his son-in-law, Galeazzo di San Severino, with an armed force to attack Asti and compel the Duke of Orleans to leave off calling himself “ Duke of Milan.” But we hear that this has had no result, for the town is very strongly fortified and well stocked with provisions, so that Galeazzo dare not risk an assault, and can do nothing beyond tamely encamping in the neighbouring dull little village of Annona. At this he is by no means content, and shows his ill-temper so plainly that many of his men have already deserted.

The only allies in Italy of the French King who have remained apparently faithful to him so far, are Ferrara and Florence, and it is a very strange thing, but we learn

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through a private letter from this last city that the Friar Savonarola is in great measure responsible. By his sermons and teaching, he constantly exhorts the people of Florence not to oppose "this most Christian King, who is to reform the Church and to be most victorious in all his undertakings." The Duke of Ferrara, the Friar's native place, is greatly guided by his words, but wishes at the same time to keep on good terms both with the French King and the League, and this is no easy matter. Speaking of Ferrara, my Duchess takes much comfort in reading a manuscript copy of some of the Eclogues written by the poet Matteo Maria Boiardo, which the gentle Princess Anna, the wife of Alfonso d' Este, has but lately sent to her. The lines which she loves to dwell upon above others, are those in praise of her father when he was still Duke of Calabria.

Thus, when Mopso reads upon the trunk of Apollo's sacred tree the prophecy that "a mighty leader who has already delivered Italy from the Turks shall put to flight Dalmatians and Slavonians and their viler lords, and hunt back the savage lion to the seashore whence he came." Then again, in the next Eclogue, the nymph Galatea arises from the River Po, and sings, lamenting: "The royal deliverer, the victor of Otranto and Poggio Imperiale, tarries long, while the fair land that was once full of every delight is ravaged by fire and sword.

" Aprete celo, e voi guardati un poco
Pietosi Dei, a le isole del Pado,
Che per tutto è roina e sangue e foco "

(Open thou, Heaven, and ye pitiful gods, look down upon the islands of the Po, for on every side is ruin and blood and fire.)

How well this describes our unhappy land! And at last the poet cries once more: "O thou chosen soul, why

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comest thou not? . . . Where can ever greater glory be won than by delivering Italy, 'languid and confused,' from the servitude of such mighty pride?" Once again, in the last Eclogue of all, Boiardo speaks with deepest feeling, and causes Orpheus to sing "the undying praise of the incomparable Lord Duke of Calabria."

You will understand, Agnese, how such words as these are like balm to the wounded soul of the hero's loving daughter. I seal this letter in haste, as I hear that a trusty courier of the Duke's is on the point of starting for Naples.

Your most faithful sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXII

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,
Begun this 26th day of June, 1495.

AL NOME DI DIO.

DEAR AND HONOURED SISTER,

You will wonder to see that we are again in our old home at Pavia, and our departure to summer quarters would have been longer delayed, had not little Francesco felt the unusual heat thus early, and his mother knew how the cooler air of Pavia would be good for him. Besides this, I must add that the Duke was anxious to hasten our departure before the arrival of the ambassadors from Maximilian and the great festivities which were to welcome them. You will have understood from a former letter, that Duke Lodovico had set his heart on receiving his investiture to the Duchy of Milan from the Emperor, as it was originally an Imperial fief to the Visconti; but no Sforza has hitherto received this crowning sanction, and he was determined to make the most of it in point of state and magnificence. Your good nuns will enjoy the details of this splendid Court ceremony, so I will write down the whole story, while my dear Duchess and the children are enjoying the peaceful delights of these lovely gardens.

When the noble envoys reached the Castello of Milan and had rested from their long journey, the ceremony took place on the Feast of San Felicissimo (May 26).

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There was a solemn Mass in the Duomo, where all the grandees of Milan were gathered, and from a magnificent tribunal, adorned with crimson brocade and golden mulberries, on the piazza outside the doors the illustrious Lord Lodovico Sforza was proclaimed Duke of Milan by the grace of God and the will of the Emperor-Elect. Then, when the important document had been read aloud, the ambassadors invested the new Duke with the cap and mantle of office and the sceptre and sword of state. Never had a more splendid and gorgeous company assembled to do honour to any Prince, and after the ceremony they all rode in stately procession to the old church of Sant' Ambrogio, in the suite of Lodovico, who there made his thank-offerings for the triumph which he had at length attained.

Gladly would I have hushed up from my Duchess the full tale of all this glory and honour, attained by the usurper who had stolen the inherited rights of her young son. Still, she was not one to spare herself in any way, or to shrink from the knowledge of facts, however painful, and she insisted upon hearing everything. But her endurance was put to the greatest test when a radiant letter, full of exultation, came from her cousin, the Duchess Beatrice, about a fortnight later. Strangely enough, this had scarcely arrived when another messenger came post-haste on the heels of the first, with the most startling news to the Castellan of Pavia, bidding him be on his guard and see to the fortifications.

Never was the proverb more fully realized that "Pride goeth before a fall" than in this case. It seems that the Duke and Duchess were resting after their festivities and excitement in their beautiful home at Vigevano, when they heard that the Duke of Orleans had made a

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night sortie from Asti with a large force, had marched to Novara, and at his summons the city had surrendered without a blow, and the citadel was taken shortly afterwards. Now this was, of course, alarming, but scarcely enough to account for the sudden deadly panic with which Duke Lodovico was seized. Novara, where his enemy was so strongly encamped, is only about twenty miles distant from the ancient city of Vigevano and the beautiful Castello on the hill above the Ticino, where the Duke has spent a fortune, and which, with its towers and arcades and lovely gardens, is a fair palace of delight, but not a strong fortress. Lodovico must have acutely realized this, for he fled in haste to Milan with his wife and children, and shut himself up in the Castello.

A hasty message was sent to my Duchess from her cousin, requesting that all her party should at once repair to the same safe refuge. She took it, fortunately, as a kind thought, but between ourselves, Agnese, I wonder whether the Duke feared that Orleans might attempt to seize little Francesco and set him up as a rival Duke of Milan.

In any case, here we are again in our old rooms in the Castello, which is one scene of noise and tumult, with the workmen engaged in strengthening the fortifications, and the poor painter Leonardo is in despair at being once more taken away from his lovely work in the convent refectory. As for the Duke, he is in a terrible condition of nervous terror, and will neither see nor speak to anyone. He knows that the people hate him for his cruel taxation, and that, if the French attack Milan, they may rise in rebellion. But in this dark moment of despair, the Duchess Beatrice has come to the rescue in an amazing way. She has shown herself openly, riding with

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a calm and smiling face through the streets of the city ; she has called together all the great lords of Milan, and arranged plans of defence with them, and lightly explained her husband's absence as caused by a touch of fever. She finds a kindred spirit in my Duchess, whose courage always rises at a hint of danger, and the two cousins are more drawn together in this crisis than I have ever seen them.

June 22.—A Venetian force of Greek Stradiots has just reached Milan, and the Duke has received encouraging news from Galeazzo di San Severino, who has practically besieged Novara and holds Orleans a prisoner there. The Lord Lodovico is rapidly recovering his nerve and presence of mind, but this breakdown of his was a revelation to us all. Maximilian has written to suggest that the "womenkind" should be sent away to Cremona to be out of danger, but you may imagine how the Duchess Beatrice and my Lady Isabella scout the idea.

We have just received your letter, written nearly a month ago and delayed on the way, in which you tell us, with great joy, that the French King has at length become alarmed, and has left Naples. You ask whether indeed he will be suffered to cross Italy without opposition, or whether his way home will be barred. I can only say that great preparations are made to cut off his retreat, and that the Marquess of Mantua is now at the head of the army of the allies which, including the German and Swiss troops of Maximilian, amounts to about twenty-five thousand men. We have heard so much of late about the absence of discipline and shameful behaviour of the French troops, that I cannot be too thankful to learn that the Convent of Santa Chiara has remained peaceful and undisturbed. And you, my Agnese ! When

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you tell me that you are able to walk like other people, and that your sudden and wonderful recovery has remained an accomplished fact, I too feel, with the dear nuns, that good has come out of evil, and that your cure is a true miracle. I am building up bright plans for the future, when these alarms of war are overpast—that in happier days of peace and security we may be together, and unite in service to our dear Lady Isabella and her children. It is a dream of hers as well as mine.

We learn that young King Ferrante, immediately on hearing of the French retreat, set forth from Ischia and hastened into Calabria, where he was met on all sides by the eager welcome of his subjects. I cannot describe the eager hope and expectation of my Duchess, and she has written at once a hearty letter of joyful congratulation to her beloved brother. Couriers are constantly arriving to Duke Lodovico who is, of course, intensely interested in every movement of the retreating army. When King Charles entered Rome in triumph on June 1, he found, to his annoyance, that the Pope had already fled to Orvieto. It is marvellous what terror these invaders inspire; they seem to be still held invincible after that insolent and unchecked procession through the whole of Italy.

Yet surely our patient land is roused at last, and will never suffer the escape of those marauding French, who, we are told, are utterly demoralized by luxury and excesses of every kind? We can talk of nothing else, and there are many rumours as to where the decisive encounter will take place; it will probably be at the crossing of some river or mountain. But the great danger appears to lie in the various interests and intrigues of the States taking part in the League; for the



Photo, Alinari.

Pinturicchio e scolari.

POPE ALEXANDER VI.

To face page 218.

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Generals must combine and be of one mind if they are to check the enemy's advance and win a crushing victory. Meantime we can only wait in patience for the fiat of the God of battles.

Addio, my Agnese! Be of good courage, and look forward with a glad heart to the return of King Ferrante, and peace for our distracted land.

Your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXIII

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 14th day of July, 1495.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE CARISSIMA,

How can I tell you the great, the tremendous news of battle, which are still ringing in our ears? What words of mine can describe to you the mortal anxiety of these last few weeks—how we watched and longed for the coming of every courier, how we have listened with trembling eagerness to every vague rumour, and how often my Duchess has prayed me to go down to the Rocca and gather up every stray word?

Now at length our painful suspense is at an end; the decisive encounter has taken place, the fate of nations is sealed, and I will make haste to tell you all about it. Late last night there was a hasty summons at the outer gateway, a brief parley, and the portcullis was raised. Then we heard the blast of a trumpet and the clatter of horse's hoofs across the paved courtyard. In an instant the whole Castello seemed to be roused; lights sparkled here and there, voices resounded and hurrying footsteps, until, as I looked down from my tower window, I saw that the Duke himself had been awakened and was hurrying forth in eager excitement. The messenger was utterly spent: he had ridden night and day, with constant change of horses, and the one he rode was almost at its

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last gasp. The man himself was wellnigh beyond speech, but his despatches announced that the armies had met and fought at Fornovo, on the banks of the Toro, that the victory was with us, but that in the clash of arms the French had escaped with their King, and were on their way to Asti. Having now made known to you the main burden of the tidings, I will tell you the whole story at leisure, as I made it out by slow degrees and later couriers.

I have already told you of the French King's arrival at Rome, where he made no long stay, but travelled on to Siena, which he reached on Saturday, June 13. Here he remained for a whole week, occupied with various trifling matters and diverting himself with certain ladies, against the advice of Commynes and others, who pointed out that his only chance of escape was to hurry on before the allied forces had combined to bar his way. He left behind, in charge of the city, three hundred of his best soldiers, whom he could ill spare, and then went on to Pisa, where he again wasted many days, and left behind various companies to fortify the garrison, and also the strongholds of Sarzana and Sarzanella. The French King stayed two days at Lucca, and then continued his journey without any anxiety or alarm, over various passes where a few resolute men might easily have stopped his passage and put his army to the rout. At Pontremoli the Swiss mercenaries picked a quarrel with the townspeople, plundered and then burnt the houses, also destroying all the provisions. This was a disaster for the French King, but again he wasted more precious time before setting forth across the steep mountains, the great guns being dragged over the passes with terrible labour.

I can dwell no longer on that most perilous journey

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and the narrow escape of our enemies through the mistakes on our side, but I am reminded once more of that saying of the Friar Savonarola, who foretold that the "French Cyrus, the scourge sent for our sins, would overcome all dangers because God, who had conducted him thither, would guard and lead him back again by the hand." Much more the Friar said, which I will tell you later, if his prophetic words come true.

Now I must hasten on to the story of that fateful battle on the banks of the Toro, when the armies of the League, to the number of twenty-five thousand men, sought to bar the passage of the French forces of scarcely nine thousand, so terribly were they reduced by fever and famine. As we listened to the broken words of the courier, the whole scene rose before me in all its tumult and confusion, amid torrents of driving rain, vivid lightning flashes, and thunder echoing from the hills, as though all the artillery of heaven took part in the conflict. The French King, in shining armour, purple and white plumes waving on his helmet, rode gallantly at the head of his army on his splendid war-charger, and performed prodigies of valour, as did the Marquess of Mantua and other Generals on our side. So fierce was the fighting that, although it lasted a bare half-hour, there was fearful bloodshed, for no prisoners were taken, and the fallen men-at-arms were killed with hatchets by the camp-followers. Both sides claimed the victory, but indeed I think our foes had the best of it, as they succeeded in crossing the river and making their escape. The Duke Lodovico is furious at this, and no words are strong enough for his blame of Francesco of Mantua, who was in command.

The personal valour of a leader cannot excuse such a failure, though it may be urged that he had no control

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over the mixed army of which he was the nominal head. Thus, much confusion was caused by the Estradiots, hardy men of the Greek nation dressed like Turks, who sleep in the open all the year by the side of their horses. These mercenaries, instead of fighting, rushed off to plunder the French camp which was full of rich treasures, for the King always travels with great magnificence.

As later news comes in, the strangest thing is to learn that there was no pursuit until the next day, when the French were well on their way; and although they suffered the greatest hardships, they still succeeded in carrying off their artillery. I cannot help feeling that many of these Italian Princes wished to keep on good terms with the French King, in case fortune should turn in his favour. There is a report that at Piacenza, there was a plot to betray that city to the French King, in trust for our little Francesco the rightful Duke; but Charles refused to listen to anything which would interfere with the rights of the Duke of Orleans. I am told that when the army reached Asti at last, on July 8, the unfortunate soldiers were in a most pitiful condition, half starved, their clothes in rags, and their shoes worn off their feet.

The French King's tent, with all its priceless spoils, became the booty of the Marquess of Mantua who sent, as a kind of peace-offering, some most splendid embroidered hangings to the Duchess Beatrice; but when she heard that her sister Isabella of Mantua had set her heart upon them—being greedy beyond measure for all treasures of art—the more generous younger sister kindly sent them to Mantua.

July 14.—My Duchess is overwhelmed with joy, having this day received a brief letter from her brother, King

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Ferrante, who, after a gallant contest with the French garrison, entered Naples in triumph, amongst the rejoicing of the people and the homage of many great lords who had been quite content to remain as vassals at the Court of King Charles. It is ever thus that these time-servers hasten to bow down before the rising sun ! The young King had lost no time in hastening through Calabria, for he reached Naples the very day after the Battle of Fornovo, of which I have given you the full story as it reached me.

My Agnese, how true your instinct has been, that the foreign rule of the French invaders would only be like a passing cloud, and how you and the Sisters must rejoice in your quiet convent at the prospect of peace in the city ! Let us know if you have any further news of the Queen and the young Princess Giovanna, for we have heard nothing of them since your letter telling us of their hurried escape to Ischia and Sicily. However, now that our dear kingdom has returned to its old allegiance, the messengers will be free to come and go in safety.

Indeed, this State of Milan seems to have become the seat of war in your place, for the Duke of Orleans still remains closely beleaguered in Novara, which he so rashly took possession of, and no help has yet come to him from the French army since it reached Asti. I hear that Novara is now so closely invested by strong forces, that the garrison and inhabitants are almost reduced to starvation, not having made good provision of corn, and that they have even been compelled to kill many of their horses for food. The Duke of Orleans sends constant couriers to the King, imploring for help, and several convoys of food have been forwarded, but scarcely anything has been able to pass through the besieging force.

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The matter has become so serious that there is much talk of making a treaty of peace, for everyone is weary of fighting, also the summer is now far advanced and the rainy season at hand.

Duke Lodovico is growing anxious and uneasy about the end of all this, and he has gone to the besieging camp himself, to hasten matters, if possible. The Duchess Beatrice was delighted to accompany him, and I hear that a splendid review of all the besieging forces was got up for her entertainment, of which her secretary who writes to me, says that he never saw the like, as they all passed by her in companies, with flags waving in the air, to the warlike strains of trumpets and drums. The great guns of the artillery were fired off with a deafening noise, at which the horse ridden by Duke Lodovico was startled and threw its rider into the ditch. This was looked upon as an omen of evil by many who were present, but the Duke himself treated it as a matter of jest.

As for King Charles, the last news we have of him at this critical moment, is that he is gone off to enjoy himself at the Court of the Duchess of Savoy at Turin, and that he has started a new love affair in the neighbourhood. Such is his incurable frivolity !

Farewell, my beloved.

Ever your devoted sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXIV

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 2nd day of August, 1495.

AL NOME DI DIO.

CARISSIMA E DILETTISSIMA SORELLA,

I cannot tell you with what delight I have received your letter, telling me that at last you have news of our dear Queen Juana. After this long and strange delay it is indeed welcome. The passages which you quote give a most vivid and picturesque account of that terrible flight from Naples, and yet at the same time are so like our gentle lady in their touching simplicity. I seem to live through that time of alarm and excitement, when King Alfonso abdicated his throne, and caused young Ferrante to be proclaimed and conducted in triumph through the city. Then his own feverish haste to be gone, his interview with his mother-in-law Queen Juana, and his imperious command that "she must make ready to start with him at once, or he would leave her behind." I can hear the soft, imploring tones of her gentle voice, as she besought the stern Alfonso to delay his going "but for three days, that she might be able to say that she had dwelt in his kingdom for a whole year."

A small matter like that would appeal to her well-ordered mind, even in the hour of a nation's crisis and disaster; and as you remind me, Alfonso became King

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on January 25, 1494, while his flight took place on January 23, 1495. He would not listen to the Queen's entreaty, but exclaimed, "Do you not hear how everybody cries out 'France, France!'?" And so "he went on board his galleys." But at the last moment, Queen Juana was persuaded to remain behind in the Royal Palace of Naples with her young daughter Giovanna, as the new King Ferrante, to whom she is tenderly attached, gave her full assurance of safety, and prayed her to remain, that she might inspire him with hope and confidence.

Alas for the vanity of man's trust in the future! Your letter does but give us fuller details of the broad facts which we knew already—how the French King crossed Italy in triumph, scarcely meeting with a shadow of opposition; in this, more fortunate even than Julius Cæsar of old, in that he conquered *before* he saw. You relate how our gallant Prince, the unfortunate Ferrante, betrayed by his commanders and abandoned by his subjects, assembled the chief citizens of Naples and explained to them the reason of his coming departure. By the sacrifice of his own high position he would save his people from the inevitable ruin and destruction of a conquered city; he would release his subjects from their oath of allegiance, and leave them free to obtain the best terms from the conqueror. You will almost give me credit for second sight when you note how exactly my instinct had already told me all this, when I sought to comfort my poor Duchess.

Your words call up before me the vision of those galleys setting sail for Ischia, with all the royal exiles on board—the Queen and her daughter looking back with longing eyes on their beloved home, and young

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Ferrante with his murmured cry: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." The story is new to us of the King's courage and presence of mind, by which he saved the citadel of Ischia and punished the treachery of the Castellan, Guasto della Candina. From the letter you quote, I gather that the little family party is quite resigned to banishment in that lovely island, and I can well imagine that dear Giovanna must be the joy and sunshine of all. I always think of her as the delightful child I remember six years ago, but time brings so many changes that she must now be a fair maiden in her fourteenth year—almost of age to be married, one of these days.

How vividly, too, the ruling passion comes out in a moment when the very earth seems shaken to its foundation, for you tell me that King Alfonso troubled less about jewels and money when he set forth from his kingdom than about having his splendid library packed to follow him, and that he was careful to take with him various wines and, above all, a collection of rare seeds and plants, for he is a devoted lover of his flowers. Well he may be, indeed, for those lovely gardens of Naples are ever a haunting dream to me.

It is strange how true we often find the saying that "joys and sorrows come not singly." It is only a week ago, since my Duchess was gladdened by a letter from her father King Alfonso, from his refuge in Sicily, and now she has this news from you of Queen Juana and our young Princess. You will be keenly interested, Agnese, in the marvellous change which appears to have taken place in the soul of this great warrior, so famous and successful in battle. I will tell you the whole story from his own handwriting, which now lies before me, for my

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dear lady has entrusted me with her precious epistle—the most curious self-revelation of a human heart in its awakening.

Yet first I must prepare the way by the astounding announcement that the King of Naples, so long renowned throughout the world as the victorious Alfonso Duke of Calabria, has turned friar. We cannot hide from ourselves, you and I, that if half the deeds of darkness and cruelty laid to his charge are true, it is a record such as no tears can wash out, no penance can atone for, and only the infinite mercy of God can pardon. But hush! I say this with bated breath, for never must such dark accusations reach the ear of my dear Lady Isabella, his daughter.

Is it possible that “the greater the sinner, the greater the saint”? At least, we cannot judge the strength of temptations which have never assailed us. May it not be possible that many a man, who has ridden atilt through all the Ten Commandments, was all the time aware in his inner consciousness that he was a great sinner, but he had no leisure to think of it in the flamboyant, tumultuous world of action? Only when defeat and disappointment came upon him, when the glittering things of this world grew dim, did he realize the veiled presence which had ever followed him unnoticed in his reckless triumphant course and, blinded like Paul with the sudden light, turn in faith and penitence to heavenly truth.

Forgive me, Agnese, if I have touched on matters too deep for me, and you shall now read the story as King Alfonso tells it:

“*Ill^{ma} Filia nostra dilectissima, Salutem.* My thoughts have turned much towards you of late, my beloved daughter, since these great and terrible troubles have

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come upon us and our unhappy kingdom; for you also have been through the waters of affliction and know what it is to be cast down from your high estate. But to me at this present time, my past state and greatness seem so far off that it is like a dream of the night. You will long ago have heard of my departure from Naples, leaving your brother Ferrante to be King in my place, and how, with a small and faithful company, I set sail for Sicily, and at Palermo was received with much honour by the Viceroy, Senor La Musa. After resting a few days, from thence we sailed to Mazzara, at the far west of the island of Sicily, a place where there is a strong castle and garrison, and which is ours of right, being granted to us by King Ferdinand of Spain, the brother of our Queen Juana.

“ You are tender and wise, my Isabella, and have ever been of a serious nature like your dear mother, and you will understand and sympathize with the story I am about to tell you, while others might make a mock of it. On my first coming hither, left alone and desolate, a broken man, crushed with memories of the past, I seemed to find my only solace in taking long solitary walks. One day my mood had taken me up the hill-side which rises from the ancient town of Mazzara, and as I climbed the rugged path, I was so absorbed in my gloomy thoughts that I went astray in the gathering mist, and wandered on amid flowering heath and arbutus, where low bushes of juniper straggled across the stony track. Then of a sudden, the clouds seemed to melt away, and as I looked up, there rose before me the grey walls of the Monte Oliveto Monastery, which I had come upon unawares. Soon I had reached the arched gateway, beneath whose shadow stood a young monk in the

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white habit of the Order. He came forward to meet me with a smile of welcome, as though I were an expected guest, and conducted me in silence across the open courtyard and through a sunny cloister to the great refectory.

“It was the hour of the midday meal, and the long narrow tables were laid out with fruit and bread for the monks, who were assembling from their work in the garden and the fields. My friend pointed to a vacant seat, and I took my place by his side. No one showed any curiosity or amazement at my presence. In some mysterious way I was accepted as one of that white-robed company—one who had need of their help and who had been led to their very gates. Later I found myself left alone with the Prior, whose quiet glance full of wisdom and understanding, seemed to read the depths of my soul. He offered me friendship and hospitality—a sheltered home of prayer and peace—before he learnt who I was; and when I had made myself known, only a deeper pity shone in his kind eyes as he led me by the hand to the dim chapel, where I humbly knelt in the lowest place while the white-robed monks chanted their orisons.

“This was how I came to Monte Oliveto, and here I have remained ever since, in this quiet haven for a storm-tossed soul. My ambition is limited by the walls of my cell, strewn with withered beech-leaves, on which I sleep with more content than ever in my stateliest palace. My life is passed in a simple round of prayer and fasting and labour, such as may bring healing to the distempered mind in this mountain solitude, remote from the world, with its turmoil and tumult. . . . The monks amongst whom I dwell, have no need to talk of holiness and sacrifice and devotion, for their religion is the all-pervading atmosphere in which they live and breathe. . . .

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“The rare seeds and bulbs which I brought from my home at Naples serve here a nobler purpose. Planted with the toil of my hands, watered by my tears of penitence, they will grow to beautify the garden of the Lord, that sunny spot on the hillside where His saints are laid to rest, until the last trump shall summon them to their reward. . . .”

There was more of a private nature, only written for the eyes of King Alfonso's daughter. I cannot describe to you her joy and comfort in this assurance of his calm content and holy peace, after so troubled and tempestuous a life. My Duchess talked to me with much deep feeling that night, and I wish that I could remember the half of what she said.

“Do you know, Violante,” she reminded me, “this is not the first time that such a marvel has happened in the history of our race? There is a strain in our blood ever ready to break out in time of stress and, believe me, often the most ardent warriors are half monks at heart, as we read concerning my ancestors in the records of Spanish chivalry. . . . Shall I confess that it is so with me to-day? If my duty did not bind me here to watch over the uncertain fortunes of my son Francesco, I should yield to my hungry craving, and go forth to seek solitude and silence in some holy secluded wilderness, far from this cheating world of vain shows. . . .”

I have not scrupled to tell you all this at length, for I know how keenly you will dwell upon every word.

Farewell, my beloved, till we meet again.

Your waiting sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXV

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
Begun this 22nd day of October, 1495.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MOST EXCELLENT AND DEARLY LOVED SISTER,

In this deep and prolonged mourning of my Duchess, we live so quiet and secluded a life that there is but little to tell you in the way of home news. Much time and care are devoted to the dear children, in whom their mother finds her chief interest and her great tie to life. Francesco is a sweet, gentle child, with a face like a little angel; but he is not quick at learning, and although immense patience and trouble are taken with him, he is more backward than his younger sister Bona. She is a delight to us all—bright and eager, with the most charming ways, and seems to inherit both the beauty and talent of her mother and grandmother. As for the baby, Ippolita, she is a fragile, delicate creature, and perhaps on that account is the best beloved of them all. She is sitting on my knee as I write to you, and although she is not yet two years old, the darling is lisping to me that she sends her love to “the poor sister, such a long, long way off.”

Speaking of the children, we had an awkward adventure a week ago. By the special desire of Duchess Bona his grandmother, Francesco was allowed to pay her a visit; but as he rode through the streets of Milan on the way to the old Sforza Palace, near the Duomo, he was

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recognized by the people, who set up shouts of "Duchetto ! Duchetto !" for the child has always been extremely popular in the city. His attendants hurried him on, and returned by side streets ; but the incident came to the ears of Duke Lodovico, who was away at the camp of the League at Camerino, and he sent a stern, peremptory message that the boy Francesco was never again to go outside the gates of the park belonging to the Castello. My Duchess and Madonna Bona were both much hurt and insulted by this command, but I have done my best to point out that the Duke's alarm is really well founded, and that we must avoid giving him any cause of anxiety.

The Duchess Beatrice, who accompanied the Duke to these conferences, has just returned to the Castello, and she came last night to the rooms of her cousin, the Lady Isabella, to give us an account of her adventures. There was a truce for a fortnight, and the ambassadors on both sides appear to have met every day, sitting on two long rows of chairs, the French representatives on one side and those of the League facing them. The Duchess was always present, and when she spoke now and then, was loudly applauded. The chief spokesman on the French side was Monsieur de Commynes, but in the excitement of the moment, others would join in, and Duke Lodovico had to exclaim : " Hold, gentlemen, I pray you ! One at a time." There was a secretary on each side, who wrote down all the articles which were agreed upon, one in Italian and the other in French, and these were read aloud to see if they were correct. The first day of the conference, it was agreed that the Duke of Orleans might have leave to come out of Novara, where he had been so long besieged and his garrison was dying of starvation.

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For this purpose a truce was granted, and on September 26, Orleans and the remnant of his soldiers marched out, with all the honours of war, to the French camp. But the greater number had already died of famine and fever, and of those who followed their master, many fell of weakness on the way. The French Duke must indeed have realized that his taking of Novara was the most unlucky exploit of his life.

It so chanced that on that very day, many thousands of Swiss mercenaries arrived to join the French King, who has now, the Duchess Beatrice believes, more than 20,000 of these rude soldiers—too late to be of any real use—for everybody is tired of the war, and King Charles only longs to go home. The Marquess of Mantua has been paying the King a visit at Vercelli, and is on the most friendly terms with him, giving and receiving splendid presents. Other Italian Princes do the same, but although Duke Lodovico has made a private treaty with France, he tells us that he “would not trust himself in the company of King Charles unless a river ran between them.” About this peace I only know that the Duke keeps Novara, Genoa, and Savona, while the King of France has promised not to support his cousin of Orleans’ claims on Milan. On his side, Lodovico has given his oath that he will help France to regain Naples, and will provide ships of war at Genoa for the purpose. But I have also learnt that this is mere deceit, and that France will wait in vain for those promised galleys.

I must keep this letter for a while, until I have a safe opportunity of sending it to you, for since the affair of the “Duchetto” the Duke has become again suspicious. Our last messenger was stopped and his wallet minutely examined.

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This 24th Day of October, 1495.—At length we have certain news of the departure of the French King and his army from our country. As soon as the treaty with Milan was signed they began to make ready for their march ; but there was much difficulty in settling with the great army of Swiss mercenaries who demanded three months' pay, after the long journey they had taken from their mountains. I am told that they were furious at being dismissed, and threatened to take the King and his chief advisers prisoners, to be held as hostages. In the end, however, the matter was settled at immense expense, and the French King hurried on to Chieri, which he reached on Sunday, October 18, when, after resting a night or two, he marched away to cross the mountains. What joyful tidings this will be for young King Ferrante at Naples !

We are much interested at this moment in a wonderful picture which the artist Zenale di Treviglio is painting as an altar-piece for the Church of San Ambrogio. On a throne in the centre sits Our Lady, with the Holy Child on her knees, adoring Angels above, and the Fathers of the Church—San Ambrogio, San Agostino, San Girolamo, and San Gregorio—standing on either side of the heavenly throne. But the supreme interest to us lies in the foreground, where Duke Lodovico, the Duchess Beatrice, and their two sons are being painted, kneeling in worship. I wish you could see this picture, which grows more life-like and beautiful every day. I have excellent opportunities of watching the great work, as the elder boy, the Count of Parma, as they call him now, is devoted to me, and will keep as still as a mouse while I tell him stories. He is not quite three years old, but looks a fine little Prince in his stiff brocade, kneeling in front, by



Photo, Hanfstaengl.

ALTAR-PIECE BY ZENALE DI TREVIGLIO.

Portraits of Lodovico Sforza and Beatrice, with their sons.

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the side of his father. As for the nine-months babe Francesco, he is to be pictured in swaddling clothes, also kneeling, close to his mother. The Duke looks very handsome, wearing his mass of dark hair and splendid costume, with the massive gold ducal chain of office. Beatrice, opposite to him, is a delightful figure, apparently absorbed in prayer and unconscious of her magnificent yellow satin dress, striped with velvet and trimmed with knots of ribbon, while priceless pearls are round her neck and twisted in her hair, with its long coil down her back.

How I wish that we had such a picture of *my* Duchess, painted in the days of her prosperity; for although to me she is as beautiful as ever, yet all her sorrows have changed her greatly since that charming sketch was taken of her by Beltraffio. But if I would keep up the courage we so sorely need, I dare not look back or dwell upon the past. You will understand, my Agnese.

I spoke of the past, but what of the present? Do we find much comfort in that? It is true that the foreign invaders are gone, but they have left doubt and suspicion and ill-feeling behind them. The other States of Italy are most indignant with Duke Lodovico for having made a private peace with France, regardless of their interests. Venice especially is full of vindictive hatred against the Duke, and looks upon him as the origin of all these troubles. It seems to me that the warning of olden times, "Put not your trust in Princes," is as much needed now as on the day when it was spoken. If we take as an example the Holy Father himself, the Sovereign Head of the Church Pope Alexander VI., we find him bowing down in humble submission and profuse in promises when the French King comes thundering at the gates of

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Rome; but when fortune turns against the Most Christian King, our Most Holy Pontiff pours forth against him all the lightnings of the Church—interdict, condemnation, and excommunication.

Then too, although all our sympathies are with King Ferrante, I could almost find it in my heart to pity that little band of French soldiers, under the gallant Gilbert de Montpensier, the husband of our dear friend Chiara Gonzaga who is eating her heart out with anxiety at Mantua. Their King has forsaken them in their extremity, and I hear that their sufferings are terrible from famine and fever.

You will patiently bear with all this moralizing, my Agnese, when you remember that from our almost cloistered seclusion, we look on as mere spectators at the turmoil and conflict of the outer world.

Farewell, my well-beloved, dearer than ever sister was before.

Your loving

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXVI

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
This 20th day of December, 1495.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE CARISSIMA,

When the messenger arrived here to-day from Naples, I received the packet with eager joy, never doubting that it brought the long-delayed news from you. But, to my surprise, the letter bore the superscription: "To the Eccellentissima e Illustrissima Duchessa Ysabella."

"It must be from my brother Ferrante," exclaimed the Duchess as with a glad smile, she cut round the massive seal with the arms of Naples. "His troubles are at an end, and he would have me share the triumph of his victories . . ." she added, and then broke off with a touch of disappointment. I watched her in ever-growing anxiety, as I read in her expressive countenance, first dismay and then an outburst of uncontrollable grief.

"Oh, Violante," she cried, "my dear father is dead! That kind, gentle Queen Juana has written to me with her own hand to break the sad tidings."

Half blinded with her tears, she pressed the letter into my hand, and this is what I read aloud to her—the touching story which no doubt has long since reached you in Naples, the fountain-head of information:

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" . . . You will already have heard, dear Ysabella, that your father, King Alfonso, has for these many months past, led a holy life of prayer and fasting, in close communion with the Olivetan monks at Mazzara. Given up wholly to penance and the devoted service of God, whom he adored at all hours of the day and during the long watches of the night, his health gave way under this most strict and austere life. He contracted a sad and painful distemper, but even then he refused to listen to the persuasion of the monks and relax the extreme hardship of his constant fasting, and exercises of devotion. They tell me that never did any man suffer greater agony and endure to the end with more wonderful and saintly patience. His death-bed was a glorious example of Christian faith, full of hope and comfort to all true believers, and thus he passed away, on the nineteenth day of November, 1495, in blessed hope of everlasting life. For if we judge from the greatness of his penitence, we may rest secure that his soul is glorious in Paradise. . . . Had he lived, it was the purpose of King Alfonso to take religious vows in a monastery of Valencia."

I paused, for my voice was no longer under control. so deeply was I moved by the pathetic words, and for a while our spirits held silent communion together. I knew my lady too well to offer the usual conventional comfort, and at the same time I felt that, when she had inwardly realized that simple record of Christian faith and hope, there would be no bitterness in her grief. For her was the loss, but for him she loved so well was infinite gain.

You will be interested in the rest of Queen Juana's letter, which tells of her last meeting with King Alfonso.

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“ . . . In that dark hour when the French entered our city and there seemed no hope, we set sail, my daughter and I, with King Ferrante, for the island of Ischia, where we abode for a while ; and you would scarcely believe what a peaceful, happy time we spent in the midst of that lovely scenery, with no cares of State, no Court duties or so-called amusements, to disturb our minds. Never have I seen my young Giovanna more brilliantly happy, hunting and riding every day, and taking long excursions with King Ferrante, in which they were often joined by the young Princess Costanza d' Avalos and her brother Alfonso, Marquess of Pescara. In these pastoral solitudes, life is so much simpler and happier than in the pomp of city life. But after a time, there came vague rumours of danger and, thinking it wiser to seek a farther refuge, we embarked with our retinue and companions in thirteen light galleys, and reached Messina on April 19. Here we found Don Federico, the brother of King Alfonso, who had arrived three days before us, and we were all received with great honour and hospitality by my countrymen, the Spanish deputy and officers.

“ As soon as the news of our arrival had reached Mazzara, King Alfonso set forth to meet us, coasting round by the shore with five galleys laden with his treasure, which he had brought to bestow open-handed upon his son Ferrante. We went down to the harbour to welcome him, and I shall never forget what a noble figure he looked in his long white monkish robe. His face was changed, thinner and more spiritual in expression, and although he treated us all with the most gentle kindliness, there was a curious air of abstraction about him. When he took leave of us a few days later, after having talked long and earnestly with his son and parted with all his

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earthly possessions, I had a haunting presentiment that I should never look upon his face again . . .

“ Dear Ysabella, you will rejoice to hear how greatly beloved is your brother Ferrante, and how he finds friends everywhere, both amongst the people and the nobles who flock to his support. As one old lord of ancient lineage said to me the other day : ‘ This young Prince is looked upon as the delight of the human race.’ In Messina he met the Great Captain of Spain, Gonzaga de Cordova, who was sent by my brother, King Ferdinand, to protect the island of Sicily. . . .”

Then at the end, Queen Juana added a few words which filled me with joy. She spoke of you and the miracle, as she calls it, of your recovery, of the reverence and affection in which you are held in the Convent of Santa Chiara, and more which I will not wound your modesty by repeating.

Do not forget, my Agnese, that if I do not often speak of your recovered health and well-being, it is only that I may not be tedious to you. For, indeed, the thought of it is ever with me, and maketh constant music in my heart. Queen Juana seems almost to wonder that you have not yet taken religious vows and become a professed Sister of Santa Chiara, but that remains a precious secret between us—one that keeps up my courage in the midst of all our troubles—the blessed hope that one day, when we are free and at peace, you will join me in the service of our Duchess, never to part again till death. *Vale spes mia.* I pray God to keep and guard you, my sister.

Ever your

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXVII

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 5th day of June, 1496.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AMATISSIMA AGNESE,

Nothing of any moment has befallen us here, but as you desire to hear everything, on behalf of your dear nuns, I will tell you all the news which reaches the Court of Milan. You remember how the Friar Savonarola of Florence foretold that the judgments of God would find out the French King for his grievous shortcomings. Letters from Lyons—where King Charles remained for about two months on his return to France—tell us that just before the holy festival of Christmas, he received tidings that the Dauphin, his only son Charles Orlando, lay dangerously ill. This caused him great anxiety, but worse was to follow, for three days later a courier arrived, who had ridden night and day from Moulins with letters that gave an account of the poor child's death. The King was greatly troubled, and without delay set forth to join his wife, Queen Anne of Brétagne, who was broken-hearted at the loss of her only child. From all reports, the little Prince, who had reached the age of three years and two months, was a very handsome and delightful boy—"Bel enfant, audacieux en parole et ne craignant pas les choses comme les autres enfants," as the French letter puts it. The

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writer ventures to hint in private, that the King recovered the more readily from his affliction as he was already jealous in his heart of this brilliant son, who might one day overshadow him in beauty and talent. He knew how Dauphins of France behave to their fathers.

This certainly seems too unnatural to be true, and yet there is no doubt that very shortly after the pompous funeral, for his own distraction the King made arrangements for a splendid ball, where the Duke of Orleans danced away with so much laughter and enjoyment, that it was plain to see he was triumphant at being now heir to the throne of France. From my heart I pity that poor Queen, both as bereaved mother and insulted wife ; for what man in his senses could think of comforting a woman mourning for her only child, by the spectacle of a gay dance ?

This mention of the King of France reminds me that he is spoken of in a letter which my Duchess has received this day from her dear cousin Anna Sforza, now Princess of Ferrara. She sends a sonnet written by a poet of Ferrara whom she greatly admires, Antonio Cammelli, called " Il Pistoia," and I must quote you the lines which refer to that shameful day of Fornovo, when the united arms of Italy could not prevent the escape of the French :

" Passo il Re Franco, Italia, a tuo dispetto
(Cosa che non fe mai' l' popul Romano),
Col legno in resta e con le spada in mano,
Con nemici a le spalle e innanti al petto.

* * * * *

Sia come vole il fine,
Si ben del mondo acquistasti l' imperio,
Mai non si estinguerà il tuo vituperio."*

* The French King has passed, O Italy, in spite of thee,
(A thing which was never endured by the Roman people),

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Madonna Anna relates an interesting experience which she has had with the Jews in Ferrara. You will remember how strongly Duke Ercole has always been moved by the exhortations of the holy Friar Savonarola, with whom he remains in constant correspondence, and labours hard, according to his lights, to reform Ferrara and make an ideal city of it in matters of religion. The Duke has passed stern laws against blasphemy, gambling, and evil living, and given command that all shops are to be closed on feast days, and nothing beyond absolute necessities are to be sold at those times in the Piazza. But he has gone farther than this, and is making a vehement effort to convert all the Jews by force. He has passed a law that all "Hebrews and Marrani" who dwell in Ferrara, must be compelled to wear the yellow badge of shame sewn on to the front of their tunics. Mindful of Holy Cross Day in Rome, when the Jews are all driven to church to hear a Christian sermon, Duke Ercole decreed that all the Jews in Ferrara should be compelled to attend and hear a special sermon addressed to them, in the great Duomo of San Giorgio.

We all know how good and devout in her religious observances is our dear, gentle Princess Anna, so that I was not surprised to hear that her father-in-law, the Duke, chose her as his companion to be present on this occasion, for which Low Sunday* this year had been chosen. It was indeed a most curious scene, that mixed

With his lance in rest, his sword in hand,
With foes behind, with foes in front.

* * * * *

Be the end what it will,
If thou shouldest acquire the empire of the world,
Still thy disgrace would never be blotted out.

* First Sunday after Easter.

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crowd of unbelievers, brought together against their will to partake of heavenly grace, and our Anna watched them from her high place with wistful hope and longing. But the dear lady was cruelly disappointed, for in all that assemblage of men, women, and children she saw nothing but scowls and mocking smiles and blank indifference. Not one seemed to be touched with the preacher's eloquence or melted to tears by the awful doom foretold to the unconverted, which distressed her tender heart beyond all words. She says that the countenances of those poor lost creatures, with their unconscious little ones, will haunt her for many a day. At the end of her letter she adds that on that day, she heard that one of the race of Israel was baptized after the Bishop's sermon, but he was a stranger, and not one of those who had been present in the Duomo and listened to the preaching of the truth.

I had broken off my writing, and sat in thought as to what would interest you in our doings, when the courier arrived, bringing your letter with news so astounding that they have taken away my breath. You tell me that our young King Ferrante has obtained from the Pope a dispensation to marry the Princess Giovanna, the half-sister of his father, the late King Alfonso of blessed memory, and therefore in a manner his aunt, and that before we can receive this message, the wedding will be an accomplished fact. Surely, Agnese, this is not possible ! It seems to me an affinity so close that no Papal brief can make it right in the sight of the Church. Yet, when I think of it, I must own that I was much troubled in mind by some words in Queen Juana's letter of which I told you. She speaks of the young people being thrown together in those Arcadian meads of Ischia,

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far from the trammels of Court, as it might be some Garden of Eden, with a Prince of seven-and-twenty for the Adam and a charming young maiden of fourteen for the Eve. It seems to me that Queen Juana has been unwise in not watching more carefully over her daughter, and in forgetting the feelings and desires of her own young days. I am disposed to look upon her as a dear, gentle, unworldly creature, who has been taken by storm, and suffered herself to be carried away by the ardent wishes of hot-headed youth.

I cannot but believe, in spite of the Pope's dispensation and the sanction of Holy Church for this strange alliance, that yet all the Christian world will be shocked and scandalized by it. Consider for a moment: the bride is the daughter of the bridegroom's grandfather, King Ferrante I., and surely this is a mixing up of the generations, suitable rather for the days of the patriarchs than these modern times. You have much to say, my sister, in praise of King Ferrante and his gallant deeds in winning back his kingdom, but in this matter you speak no word of blame. Is it your boundless charity, or does the sanction of Holy Church overcome all obstacles in your opinion?

I have not yet seen my Duchess to tell her what has happened, but I dare not keep the matter secret, lest the rumour come upon her suddenly, unawares. She is so devoted to her young brother that anything which may dim his fame will be a sore trouble to her. I cannot wait to tell you what she says, for the messenger who brought your letter and will be the bearer of this to you, has already one foot in the stirrup.

I pray God to keep and guard you, and so farewell and undying love from your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XXXVIII

IN THE CASTELLO OF PAVIA,

This 17th day of August, 1496.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE CARISSIMA,

Now that the Duke Lodovico and the Duchess Beatrice are away on their travels, we have seen much lately of that charming young daughter of the Duke, who loves our company and is so gay and bright that she is like a ray of sunshine to my Duchess. (Her unknown mother must have been a woman of great charm, even if, as it is said, of lowly birth.) Bianca has such a sweet face that it is always a delight to look upon her. As you know, she has been betrothed to Messire Galeazzo de San Severino ever since the last day of 1489, more than six years ago; and he is in such high favour with his lord that he is always in attendance on the Court. At the present moment, he has gone with the Duke and Duchess to meet the Emperor Maximilian, and his wife—as he calls her already, for the final marriage ceremony will be almost at once—to-day read us a long letter, giving a full account of the expedition.

Bianca has kindly suffered me to take notes of it, which will greatly interest you and your nuns of Santa Chiara.

“ On the 5th day of July we set forth, in sultry weather, and were thankful to leave our horses and embark on a

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light Bucentaur to sail up the beautiful lake of Como. Our voyage was without adventure, save for one terrible thunderstorm, during which we sheltered in the little harbour of Bellagio, a lovely village, with flowers ramping everywhere, like a Garden of Eden . . . ; and the country-folk brought us offerings of delicious peaches and other fruits. Horses had been sent on to await us at Colico, the head of the lake, and we had a long, hot day's ride as far as Sondrio, where we were hospitably received in an old palace, close to the great mountain torrent called Il Malero. We had now reached the Val Tellina, and our road the next day was one long ascent, and, after passing the watch-tower on the hill, we mounted to the pilgrimage church of Our Lady of Tirano, where we all made our offerings to the Holy Madonna. That night we slept at Tirano, and found ourselves in the midst of those terrible mountains, which form a barrier for our country. So we went on from day to day, rising through vine-clad slopes, crossing torrents and rivers, passing here and there a castle or a secluded village, until at length we arrived at Ceppina and reached the level green valley of Bormio, shut in by mountains towering to the skies, with their lower slopes covered by pines and their rocky crags and peaks lost in perpetual snow. At the other side of this valley we came to the ancient monastery, the Abbey of Mals, which had been fixed as the meeting-place with the Emperor.

“ In this gloomy solitude we waited two days, and then were rewarded by the gay sound of hunting-horns and the coming of Maximilian with a fine company. The procession began with a number of foot-soldiers, bearing long lances, such as the Germans use ; then came about fifty great lords of the Empire, clad in hunting suits

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and riding with falcons on their wrists. I wish you could have seen the Emperor himself, a majestic figure, wearing a grey tunic, with the badge of the Golden Fleece round his neck, a great lion's skin hung over one shoulder and a black velvet cap on his princely head. He was followed by a crowd of pages and attendants, looking very gay in their garb of red, white, and yellow, as they climbed up the mountain-side to the abbey gates.

" You may picture to yourself how warmly Maximilian was welcomed by the Duke and Duchess, but I was not present, and only joined them when they went to attend Mass in the chapel, His Majesty in the middle, leading the Lady Beatrice with his right hand and her husband with the left. Later in the day, they all rode together to the lodgings of Maximilian at Colorno, about eight miles farther on, where we were entertained with a splendid feast in a pavilion under the trees. It was a most friendly meeting ; the host insisted on helping his noble guests himself, and all three washed their hands in the same bowl. After dinner they talked together pleasantly, and then rode off to a place called Mals, near by, where they had another feast.

" The Venetian ambassador, Foscari, and the Cardinal of Santa Croce the Papal Nuncio, also arrived that day, and had a conference with Maximilian and our Duke, and an important league was formed ; but I will not trouble you, my Bianca, with tedious affairs of State. . . . The next day, when the ambassadors were gone, our royal party began to enjoy themselves, and we took part in a most delightful chamois hunt, which I enjoyed more than anything else on this journey. The next day the Emperor departed with all his retinue, and rode back over the mountains to meet the Empress Bianca, having

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promised to pay Duke Lodovico a visit later in the year. We are now about to travel back to Milan, hoping to arrive in time to keep the Feast of San Lorenzo and to make ready our palace at Vigevano for you, my Bianca, and the long-awaited happiness of our true married life. . . .”

As the young girl read this letter to us, we tried to remain unconscious when, by her hesitation and blushes, she left out the tender passages and terms of endearment. I do from my heart pray that, after this long waiting, dear Bianca may have a most happy married life. She parted from us with many promises to tell us all about the Emperor’s expected visit, as by that time she would be “Madonna de San Severino” at Court, in attendance on the Duchess Beatrice, and could speak as an eye-witness.

I forgot to tell you that we came to Pavia rather earlier than usual this spring, and during the hot weather my Duchess has much enjoyed the fresh breezes here in these lovely gardens, where she spends most of her time with her children. She is already beginning to take their education quite seriously, although Francesco forgets everything and the little girls are still such babies. I was much touched and interested when she told me the other day that she was trying to remember her own early training, and had made a careful study of her mother’s notebooks, from which she asked me to make a fair copy of the following directions :

“*Rules of Conduct for my Son.*—He must learn at all times to do honour to God and Holy Church . . . ; to be respectful and obedient to his parents, his teachers, and other good and wise people. . . . He must be careful to

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show politeness to all, according to their rank . . . and to be pleasant of speech to everyone he has dealings with, such as servants and those of lower rank than himself. . . . He must be taught to keep his hands under control, as well as his tongue, and on no account must he lose his temper under any provocation. He cannot learn too early not to wish for everything he sees, not to be excited by every trifle, and, above all, he must patiently do without that which he cannot obtain honestly. . . . He shall not listen to slander, nor tell lies, nor practise any form of deceit. . . .”

Then follow directions for practical teaching, given by Messire Baldo Martorelli, a pupil of the famous Vittorino, who had taught Ippolita, Duchess of Calabria, and who went to Naples as her secretary. He seems to have laid great stress on the importance of games, and gave rules for the teaching of dancing, *pallone*, and, above all, the art of riding, to which was added full particulars as to the choosing of good horses. . . .

There was much more in these precious old books which will be of value at a later date, when the children are older and begin their study of languages. Now it seems to me that the great matter is to keep our darlings happy and in good health.

I was on the point of sealing this budget of small news, which has been delayed by our hasty return to Milan, by order of the Duke Lodovico (who is said to fear that the Emperor may meet little Francesco, the rightful Duke), when the promised letter arrived from Madonna Bianca “de San Severino,” as she can now proudly sign herself. She writes from her own palace at Vigevano, where she has to do the honours to the Venetian ambas-



Photo, Anderson.

MASSIMILIANO SFORZA, SON OF LODOVICO
SFORZA.



Photo, Anderson.

FRANCESCO SFORZA II, SON OF LODOVICO
SFORZA.

Fresco by Lippi.

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sadors who have come to meet Maximilian, now staying at the Castello with the Duke and Duchess. Unfortunately, her newly-made husband, Messire Galeazzo, is laid up with an attack of fever, but I can imagine the shy and charming way in which she takes his place. The poor ambassadors had arrived in pouring rain, during which they had remained at the gate of the Castello, listening to a long Latin oration of welcome. The next day they had an audience with His Majesty, and were much impressed with his magnificent presence, which owed nothing to his dress, for he was simply clad in a long black velvet mantle, with a chain of gold and the Order of the Golden Fleece as his only ornament. He sat on a kind of throne, covered with cloth of gold, with the Papal Nuncio on one side and my Lord Lodovico on the other.

Bianca is much impressed with the great pleasure which the Emperor seems to take in the company of the Duchess Beatrice and her two boys. He has already asked that the elder one, hitherto called Ercole, after the child's grandfather, should now be called Maximilian, after himself. The Imperial guest has been shown everything—the palace, the library, the wonderful farm and stables, while the Lady Beatrice herself has accompanied him through the beautiful gardens, pointing out all the rare plants. During the last week of the Emperor's stay at Vigevano, a constant succession of outdoor entertainments and hunting parties were arranged, "and I myself," adds Madonna Bianca, "had the honour of riding by the side of His Majesty on the last day, when my dear husband was well enough to join the chase. It was a splendid occasion, and to me was most interesting, for the Lord Lodovico, my father, had brought out his hunting

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leopards,* and one of them was let loose from his chain, and sprang upon a hare close to me. I was only too sorry when all these festivities came to an end with the departure of the Emperor, to whom Duchess Beatrice presented a splendid litter, made of gold curiously woven and embroidered. I wish you could have been with us, dear Madonna Isabella, but I hope to meet you soon at Milan, and tell you all these wonders by word of mouth. . . .”

I am glad that Bianca is happy and prosperous, but I fear that all this success in everything he touches, and his high alliance with Maximilian, will make Duke Lodovico more arrogant than ever. I am told a witty Venetian remarked quite lately how the Duke boasted that “The Pope is his chaplain; the Emperor his fighting captain, or Condottiere; the Republic of Venice his banker, as they spend for his gain; and that the King of France may be called his courier, who comes and goes at his will.”

I do not think you will accuse me of want of charity, my Agnese, when you remember how he has wronged my Duchess.

Christ guard you from all ill.

Your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

* The cheetah (*Felis jubata*).

LETTER XXXIX

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,

This 18th day of October, 1496.

AL NOME DI DIO.

I have been unable to write to you earlier, my Agnese, so crushed have we been in spirit by this most piteous and lamentable news, which reached us first as a vague rumour, and was then most sadly confirmed by your letter and that of Queen Juana. My Duchess had watched the coming of the messenger with anxiety, but when she saw the black seals and quickly learnt the truth, she gave one bitter cry, calling herself "Madonna infelicissima! Unica in disgrazia!"

How calmly and solemnly all was revealed in those opening words of yours: "May God have mercy upon the blessed soul of King Ferrante, which passed away on the seventh day of October (1496) from this life, after a pilgrimage of twenty-seven years, one month, and eleven days. May he be led through the gate of salvation to his heavenly rest."

In the moment of her own deep affliction, Queen Juana had the Christian charity to think of the Lady Isabella, and give her a full account of the latter end of her dear brother. After the hardships of his victorious campaign in the unhealthy malarious districts of Calabria, King Ferrante had retired with his young wife to their beautiful pleasure-house at La Somma, on the slopes of Mount

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Vesuvius. He must already have been sickening with the fatal fever which carried him off, notwithstanding all that the physicians could do to fight the disease. The pious Queen adds: "My beloved son-in-law first received all the Sacraments of Holy Church with the greatest contrition and devotion . . . hearing of spiritual and devout things. . . . I know not how we can ever find comfort. My poor daughter is like one distracted, and we almost fear for her life and reason, suddenly struck down by this cruel blow in the midst of her brief and unspeakable happiness. She shuts herself up, poor child, in her darkened chamber, and will neither speak nor touch food. . . ."

This is a sad world, Agnese. Think of it! In three short years my Duchess has lost her husband, her father, and now her brother, who was her joy and pride, and the last hope of better fortune for her son and herself. Unpitying Death has snatched him from us in the very hour of victory, when he had reconquered all his dominions and could look forward at last to peace and happiness in his beautiful home.

I was dumb in the presence of such affliction, and knew not how to speak one word of comfort. I could but sit by the side of my dear lady, mingle my tears with hers, and watch her changing moods. Her thoughts dwelt upon the past with such passionate love, that all the old memories came crowding round her and clamouring for speech. Presently she began: "Do you remember, Violante, how on that long, weary wedding journey my dear brother watched over me, and was ever at hand to cheer and gladden my gloomy thoughts with his bright sympathy? I seem to hear that merry voice, and see that handsome, laughing face. It was always the same when

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we were children together, the two of us, and he was the elder brother, so good to his little sister. . . ." Then she would break off in tears, before dwelling once more on those unforgotten stories of their childhood, little incidents of no account, only precious as symbols of brotherly love and comradeship. But ever the past led up to the present, and she would make her pathetic lament for the gallant young Prince, cut off in the prime of his strength and triumph.

Yet all this brought unconscious relief, and my poor darling was gaining courage to fight against the violence of her grief. My patience was rewarded, and some instinct brought to my mind certain consolations of reason and philosophy, for I knew that the comfort of religious faith and hope would never fail her in the end. I remembered those words of Marcus Aurelius in his *Golden Book* : " O man, you have been a citizen of the great city, and what matters it to you for how many years ? Why complain if the time is short ? It is as if an actor should demur at leaving the stage after the end of three acts, when that is the whole piece. Be content with that, if the Master is content."

I had spoken this in a low voice, as though thinking aloud ; then I added that " those whom the gods love die young." " In the memory of posterity our King Ferrante will live as he left this world, eternally a gallant youth in his splendid prime." At this she turned towards me, and I knew that she was listening. But I have said enough, my Agnese, and will dwell no more on my poor efforts to find salve for a wound incurable.

Since I wrote these words, a letter has come from the new King of Naples, Don Federico, the uncle of my Duchess, who succeeded to the throne of his nephew

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Ferrante. He writes with deep affection and much kindness to his favourite niece, praying that she will look upon his kingdom as hers and, if need be, that she will seek a safe home and protection for herself and her children. He offers to send galleys to meet her at Genoa at the first intimation of her wishes, and to supply her with money for her expenses, that she may travel in state suitable to her rank. Nothing could be more thoughtful and considerate, and we know that he is sincere, for he is a good and trustworthy Prince. Then he goes on to tell the story of the splendid funeral obsequies of the most excellent and illustrious King Ferrante II., of blessed memory, who was borne to his resting-place in the holy church of San Domenico, in Naples, with all the pomp and magnificence which becomes the dignity of so great and beloved a King.

“ All the people of Naples came forth to do honour to their dead lord and master and, with tokens of grief and mourning, went to meet the funeral procession by way of the quays of the Marinella and the Porta Carmine, some even making their way as far as Portici. Outside the gate the King's bier, carried under a stately *baldachino*, was met by the various great companies of priests and friars, of men-at-law, of city magistrates, of officers of the late King and chief men of Naples, bearing a myriad of crosses and banners, and many with flaring torches, who all formed themselves into a solemn and magnificent procession, which was joined by all the Ambassadors, the Bishops, and the great lords of our country, on horseback, with their arms displayed, led by gorgeous heralds on massive war-horses, richly accoutred, with their emblazoned silken banners floating in the breeze. These all made their way slowly through

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the streets until they reached the Largo, opposite the great church of San Domenico Maggiore. Here a noble funeral oration was given by the Lord Bishop, treating of all the virtues, the courage and constancy, the victorious success, and the sudden death of the young King they all deplored so deeply. At this point there were sobs and lamentations on all sides, and tears without number. . . . Then, at the end of the High Mass, when the words were spoken, "Et verbum caro factum est," all the heralds cast down their great banners and laid them flat on the marble floor before the high-altar. . . ." Then follows the account of the rest of the service, and how the mortal remains of King Ferrante had been embalmed, and were placed in a velvet-covered chest in the "royal vault behind the high-altar . . . where the body of his grandfather rests."

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." And with this, dear Agnese, I will end this sad letter, for I have not the heart to add another word.

May God guard you is the prayer of

Your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XL

IN THE CASTELLO OF MILAN,
Begun this 24th day of November, 1496.

AL NOME DI DIO.

Agnese, you will not wonder that our life this winter is tuned to a minor key. My Duchess bears her grief with marvellous fortitude, finding solace in visiting the sick and afflicted; for in our coarse black mourning garb we pass unrecognized through the streets, like any other poor women of the city. Many sad and terrible things are revealed to us. Thus we learn how the people are groaning under the burden of cruel taxes, cruelly enforced; many are reduced to absolute poverty, while others sell all that they possess, and leave their homes to escape from this grinding exaction. In some places we hear that there have even been tumults and rioting, put down with a merciless hand, and with grievous loss of life.

Can we wonder that his subjects hate him, when this is the price they have to pay for the glory and magnificence of the Duke Lodovico, that "son of Fortune," as he boasts himself? To achieve his greatness, reckless expenditure has been needed—for mercenary armies, for bribes to foreign ministers, and for gorgeous entertainments of every kind—such as have been prepared for the Emperor. I know that the unfortunate professors and teachers in the Universities of Milan and Pavia,

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brought hither from distant homes, are in despair at not receiving their salaries, and many other people in the Duke's employment are in the same evil case. Even my Duchess cannot get the income of her dowry paid, and is reduced to such poverty that she has to pawn some of her jewels. And this although she spends nothing on herself, wearing only simple mourning, and keeping no state for these two years past. All her wonderful dresses and adornments are put by carefully in her wedding-chests for her little daughters to wear some day. Her only care and thought is for her children, and for them she would spare no cost.

I do not think that I am unduly given to superstition, but I feel as if there hung over us some heavy gloom—a forecast of coming disaster. Amongst others who seem to have the same oppression is the Duchess Beatrice, who is now in delicate health, and since her return from Vigevano has been quite unlike her bright, merry self. This may be in part accounted for if, as I hear, dark rumours have reached her of her husband's strange infatuation for that young lady-in-waiting of whom I have already spoken to you. The Duke must indeed have had his head turned by success and adulation, thus to insult the wife whom he professes to adore. His passion for the Lady Lucrezia Crevelli is known throughout the city, for he has openly heaped presents and honours upon her, and has even recently caused her portrait to be painted by the great painter Messire Leonardo. The young Duchess has had good cause for jealousy before, but this last inconstancy must have been a cruel blow both to her pride and her love. The young lady, who belongs to a noble family of Milan, is very charming and attractive, and has always been a special

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favourite with her mistress, who has shown extreme kindness to her.

I had written thus far, when my Duchess came to me in much distress, with an open letter in her hand, which she gave me to read. It was a brief message from her cousin Beatrice to gently break some sad tidings to her, lest they should come with too sudden a shock. Two days ago, on November 22, the sweet, lovely young Bianca Sforza,* who had only been the happy wife of Galeazzo di San Severino for a few months, had been suddenly taken ill in her beautiful home at Vigevano, and had passed away, to the unspeakable grief of her husband and her father, Duke Lodovico. "I cannot tell you how great is the distress and trouble which the death of Madonna Bianca has caused me. She held so dear a place in my heart, and was so closely akin to us, that the loss is greater than any words of mine can speak. May our merciful God have her blessed soul in His keeping!" wrote the young Duchess. Then she added a few words to say that all the entertainments prepared for the coming again of the Emperor were postponed, and she was going with her husband, in deep mourning, to meet their guest at Pavia.

How true is it, my Agnese, that "the flowers must spring up and fade away, and the young must die"! And tell me, dear, do you believe that coming trouble sometimes casts its shadow before? I have more to say to you, but I have not the heart to finish this letter to-day.

December 2.—We have been present at a Requiem Mass in the Duomo, for the repose of the soul of the beloved Madonna Bianca, at the same hour as the like solemn

* Illegitimate daughter of Lodovico.

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service was held at Pavia, and attended by the Emperor and his hosts. The Duchess Beatrice was so much overcome, that she has been brought back to Milan for the rest and quiet which are so needful to her. It is quite touching to see the high-spirited girl so gentle and loving as she is with my Duchess at present. All their past rivalry seems to be forgotten in this time of trouble and suffering.

After bringing his young wife to the Castello, Duke Lodovico departed hastily to entertain the Emperor and the Venetian ambassador at the beautiful palace of Cussago, about six miles out of Milan, on the way to Como. We are expecting shortly another visitor here, whose presence will most vividly recall to my Duchess the loss of her brother, King Ferrante—the Lady Chiara Gonzaga, sister of the Duke of Mantua and widow of the unfortunate Duke Gilbert de Montpensier—who was left behind in the kingdom of Naples, forsaken by the French King to die, gallantly defending a forlorn hope. It will be a sad meeting of these two widowed ladies, who are much attached to each other, although, in the unhappy tangle of events, their husbands were brave and generous foes.

I cannot end my letter with all these sad and pitiful stories, but will add that which I know cannot fail to charm and interest you. It has been the custom of late for my Duchess to attend early Mass at Santa Maria delle Grazie, where, by-the-by, we often meet little Prince Massimiliano, taken there by his tutor. By special permission of the Prior, who is a good friend of ours, we are allowed to visit the refectory afterwards, and watch our admirable Messer Leonardo at his work, which is now really making good progress. I have already

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spoken of his marvellous design to cover a whole wall with the picture of the Last Supper of our Lord and Saviour. The artist has had the inspiration to seize the solemn moment when our Lord speaks those awful words, "One of you shall betray Me," and to portray their effect upon His twelve disciples seated at table on either side of Him. Full of startled, eager curiosity and dismay, they seek to discover the guilty wretch whose deed is foretold by their Divine Master, and their various faces most vividly express fear, grief, anger, astonishment, and love. So clear is the painter's insight into spiritual things, that he does this without violating the calm essential to a sacred picture. There is no tumult, no loud outcry of repudiation, nothing to mar the Divine Majesty of the Christ who spoke those accusing words. All breathes a holy spirit of peace.

The whole design is now traced in, and a great portion is finished, although the monks are very impatient at the long delay in the completion of the work. But a great genius must be suffered to do his masterpiece in his own way. We hear that on some days Messer Leonardo will mount his high scaffold hung against the wall, in the early morning, and stay engrossed in his painting during the long hours, taking no thought of food or rest. Again, at other times he will simply stand in deep thought, looking at his work, and contemplating those wonderful figures, which seem to grow by magic under his hands. Or he has been seen to hurry into the refectory, dash in a few touches on a face, and then depart in like haste. The faces of the Christ and of the traitor Judas are not yet drawn in.

This great artist is very friendly with my Duchess, who never interrupts or disturbs him; and in his rare

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intervals of leisure we have been privileged to see a number of his studies in red chalk, which he made as first designs. Amongst those I remember best were San Bartolommeo and San Jacobi minor side by side, most noble in expression ; San Matteo and San Filippo ; but San Giovanni was the most beautiful of all, full of spiritual love. It is wonderful where he can find models for these fine majestic heads, but we are told that when he meets a face in the street which attracts him, he will follow it for hours, and remember it so well that he can draw every feature. There was one rough sketch for a Judas which haunts me : it was the embodiment of a traitor, so hateful and yet so absolutely impassive. For the Christ, he has found nothing yet to satisfy his ideal. But I will add no more, for words of mine can give you no idea of the Master's wonderful insight and genius.

In the hope that my long letter has not wearied you, I bid you farewell, and pray that Christ may guard you till we meet again.

Your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XLI

IN THE CORTE VECCHIO, MILAN,

This 9th day of February, 1497.

AL NOME DI DIO.

Agnese, when I tell you all that has happened, you will see how my dark forebodings were justified. The news of the great and terrible catastrophe which has befallen the Court of Milan in the sudden death of the Duchess Beatrice will have already reached you, but it is impossible to realize at a distance the consternation and dismay here in Milan. I told you that she was in delicate health, but she was so young—only twenty-one, in the very prime of her youth and beauty—so fortunate above other women in her splendid position, her greatness and magnificence . . . that no one ever dreamed of disaster. New Year's Day was on a Sunday, and the next day the Princess took a chariot drive through the park and the city as far as the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, seeming to be in her usual health. That night there was dancing in the Rochetta, and games, to amuse her, but she was suddenly taken ill; a still-born son was born, and soon after midnight the young mother passed away.* All was confusion for a time in the Castello, and at first no one could believe the sad report. Messengers were hurrying to and fro; the Duke

* Beatrice died on January 3, 1497, aged twenty-one years and six months.

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was said to be half wild with grief, but he himself dictated the despatches which were sent off in every direction.

Orders were at once given for the most magnificent funeral ceremonies, that nothing might be wanting to do honour to the dearly-beloved and most lamented Duchess. The poor young creature looked very beautiful, clothed in one of her most gorgeous robes of gold brocade adorned with gold network, her delicate hands clasped, and the long dark curls falling round her face and neck, white and pure as marble, and no one could look at her without tears as she rested on her bier of cloth of gold. It was such a touching and pathetic testimony to the vanity of earthly pomp.

The ambassadors from foreign Courts had the honour of carrying the bier to the gate of the Castello, where it was handed on to the Privy Councillors, and then taken by the magistrates of the city, while all the ducal family followed in long black mourning cloaks. Amid the weeping crowds who thronged the streets were great companies of priests and nuns and monks, holding aloft crosses of gold and silver, and there must have been more than a thousand wax torches borne in the procession. At the gates of Santa Maria delle Grazie the ambassadors again received the bier, and carried it to the steps of the high-altar, where it was received by the Reverendissimo Cardinal Legate in his purple robes, who said the whole funeral Office, supported by two Bishops. All the people were in black, and I believe that four hundred Masses were said in Milan on that day for the repose of her soul. A hundred tapers are kept burning night and day around the great stone sarcophagus, supported by lions, in which her mortal frame was laid to rest, and many Masses are

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said daily since that fatal Tuesday, January 3, and many Offices to Our Lady of Pity.

The Duke Lodovico is said to be overwhelmed with grief, and to show no measure in the signs of his mourning ; but in some way I cannot understand, his troubled mind has brought cruel disaster upon my Duchess. I hardly know how to tell you what has befallen us. Not long after the death of the Duchess Beatrice, we were surprised to receive a visit from the Lady Camilla Sforza, widow of Costanzo, Lord of Pesaro, who is in charge of Lodovico's sons. She seemed much distressed at the message which she had to give, which was nothing less than a request that Madonna Isabella would leave her rooms in the Castello, and take up her abode in the gloomy old Visconti Palace, the Corte Vecchio opposite the Duomo, which has been vacant since the departure of Duchess Bona for France nearly two years ago. At first my Duchess was dumb with surprise, then she coldly asked the reason why she should be turned out of the Castello, which had been her home since her marriage. Camilla could offer no explanation : the Duke had given no reasons for his command ; . . . then, rather awkwardly, she went on to say that " it would make no difference to the young Prince Francesco, who would still have the great park, the meadows, and woods belonging to the Castello for his daily rides, as the Duke desired that he should remain, and be brought up with his cousins Massimiliano and Francesco."

Never have I seen anyone so moved with indignation and dismay as my dear lady. She stood up with such a glance as made Camilla quail before her. " So my Lord Lodovico is not content with robbing my son of his crown, but he would also deprive him of his mother ? Bid him come

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to me himself, that I may speak my mind to him, and hear what answer he will give." The poor lady, only anxious to make her escape, was ready to promise anything, but I had my doubts that the interview would never take place.

I dare not dwell upon the heart-breaking time which followed. My Duchess has been trained in the school of adversity, and can resign herself to the will of God—to the inevitable; but so long as the issue of battle is uncertain, she will fight like a lioness for her young. How earnestly I pleaded her cause with all those who have any influence upon the Duke Lodovico! but my eager claims for a mother's rights, my urgent entreaties for generosity or pity, were all of no avail. The tyrant was inexorable. I could not even learn his reasons; all that I could gather was his impatient remark that "Madonna was a woman, and therefore he would not dispute with her." I saw much of Camilla Sforza, who is a good, kind creature, devoted to the charge of the young Princes, and she solemnly promised that in her tender care, our Francesco would be well and happy. She strongly impressed upon me that submission was the only true wisdom on our part; and before we actually moved here, to the Corte Vecchio, we had obtained the concession that the dear boy should be brought to visit his mother once a week. There is nothing to prevent my seeing him oftener if I behave with great discretion, for I have many friends in the Castello; and I have also learnt that he is often taken abroad in the city with little Massimiliano and his tutor, especially to see the early Mass at Santa Maria delle Grazie. The child is still so young—only six years old, and backward for his age—that he does not feel the parting from his mother as I

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had feared, and, to all appearance, he seems quite happy in his new surroundings. I am afraid that this is not unmixed comfort for his poor mother, who is very jealous of his affection being given to others. It is a most sad state of things, but Camilla Sforza secretly gives me reason to hope that it may be only for a time.

I cannot tell you, Agnese, how I have troubled to discover the reason of this cruel separation. Can it possibly be some fierce form of jealousy on the part of the Duke, that he cannot bear to see his nephew enjoying a mother's love, while his own sons are deprived of it? Or is it some fear that our Francesco might in time supplant his own boy—a kind of superstitious foreboding which comes to a man when he has reached the summit of his ambition? Or is it possible that his young wife had exerted her influence on behalf of my unfortunate Lady, and that without her kindly interest he would have taken our darling long ago? All is darkness, and maybe we shall never know the truth. Meantime pray for us, my dear sister, for we are very unhappy and in sore need of strength and patience.

Evermore your loving

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XLII

IN THE CORTE VECCHIO, MILAN,

This 2nd day of December, 1497.

AL NOME DI DIO.

I am deeply distressed, my Agnese, that you have received none of my letters since that of February last. For some time past I have suspected treachery in our household which, as you know, with the exception of a few faithful old servants, is entirely chosen and paid by Duke Lodovico. Evidently the order had gone forth that no complaints from us were to be allowed to reach Naples, to avoid any complications with King Federico. Our good Dionigi, who was so devoted to his master the late Duke, of blessed memory, has discovered this, and has promised to find a safe means of securing that this letter shall reach you.

There is so much to tell that I scarcely know where to begin. You ask if our little Francesco has been restored to his mother. Yes, indeed; that trouble was not of long duration, either because of our impurity, or that we had powerful friends who used their influence on our behalf. The enclosed garden of this old palace is a very different playground for the children, and they sadly miss the beautiful meadows and woods, the lake with its swans and wild-fowl, the fresh running streams, and bridges of the domain round the Castello. But in some respects we have a new feeling of freedom,

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now that we are no longer under the immediate eye of the Duke Lodovico, who is our evil genius, and whom we can never trust. We can receive our own friends—some of the poets and artists who in the bygone days of Duchess Beatrice thronged to her receptions. Amongst these, my Duchess is especially interested in the gallant youth Count Baldassare Castiglione, who is completing his education at the University of Milan, having returned here after the death of his father, Count Cristoforo. He has remained very loyal and devoted to the Lady Isabella since her troubles, and his keen interest in art and literature makes him a delightful companion. Another frequent visitor is the young Archbishop of Milan, Ippolito d' Este, the Boy Cardinal, as they call him, for he is now only eighteen, and has been a Cardinal for nearly four years. He is very fond of little Francesco, and constantly takes him for rides with his cousin Massimiliano.

You remember the gossip about the Lady Lucrezia Crevelli? A son was born to her last May, who received the name of Gianpaolo Sforza, and to this child and his mother, Lodovico has promised a splendid estate—the beautiful palace and grounds of Cussago and Saronno, which he had bestowed upon his wife Beatrice only three years before. This princely gift seems only an act of just reparation, and of another such we are constantly reminded, as the splendid Palazzo del Verme, close to us on the Piazza del Duomo, was given to Cecilia Gallerani as an inheritance for another illegitimate son of Duke Lodovico—Cesare—whom we often see out riding, a beautiful boy of six years old.

You will have already heard that the Signoria of Venice have long been suspicious about the French leanings of



Leonardo da Vinci.

SUPPOSED TO BE LUCREZIA CRIVELLI.

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their Captain-General, the Marchese Francesco of Mantua, and that they dismissed him from his post last April, to the great dismay of all the Este family. A coolness has ensued between Milan and Mantua, but Duke Ercole of Ferrara, who is anxious to keep the peace, sent his son Alfonso and our dear Anna Sforza, his wife, on a visit here last June. Her kind and loving sympathy was very pleasant to my Duchess, and she was often with us, while her husband enjoyed the company of Messer Galeazzo. He has been much occupied about a wonderful suit of inlaid armour, which was being made for the Prince of Ferrara by those famous craftsmen, the Missaglia. It is to be of unique perfection and beauty, such as could be made in no other city, and we are growing quite learned about all the technical details, on which our young nobles can talk by the hour. It is a dull time for them, as since the death of the Duchess Beatrice there have been no tournaments, no entertainments, no joyous hunting and hawking parties at Vigevano or Cussago; indeed, I am told that when the Emperor Maximilian asked Duke Lodovico to send him a choice falcon, he replied that he had given up his birds, but that Messer Galeazzo would send one of his famous breed to His Imperial Majesty.

I was on the point of sealing this letter when news reached Milan which has overwhelmed us with grief. I had only just written about our pleasure in seeing once more the Lady Anna, who had confided her eager hopes to my Duchess, and now we learn that the same sad fate has befallen her as to her sister-in-law Beatrice. A child was born to her, so long desired and hoped for, but never to enjoy the light of day, and the young mother only survived a few hours, and then passed away, to the enduring sorrow of all who knew her, and, above all, to

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her father-in-law, Duke Ercole, to whom she had been the sweetest and most loving of daughters. There was universal mourning, both in her early home at Milan and also in Ferrara, the city of her adoption, where her gentleness and charity had made her greatly beloved by the people.* I can only send this hurried account, as Dionigi is waiting for my letter. *Vale spes mia.* I pray God to keep and guard you, my Agnese.

Living ever in hope of our meeting,

Your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

* SONNET OF TEBALDEO OF FERRARA ON THE DEATH OF
ANNA SFORZA D' ESTE.

“ Visto Morte dal Moro chiuso il passo
A Carlo, che se armava un' altra volta,
De che l' empia expectava preda molta,
Disse : Impunito mai questo non lasso.
Nè in polve il scrisse, ma in un duro sasso,
E cum l' arco a la terra de Hercul volta,
Anna (fior de' Sforzeschi) hebbe a noi tolta,
Nè mai sotterra andò corpo sì lasso.
Chè non sendo del vincer ben sicura
Morte, quanto era bella Anna, lei fiera
Tanto sì fe in la pugna e tanto male dura.
Lassare Italia a' Galli men male era ;
Potea un dì liberarse ; ma Natura
Far una altra opra tal mai più non spera.”

LETTER XLIII

IN THE CORTE VECCHIO, MILAN,
This 1st day of July, 1498.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE CARISSIMA,

If much of my news is already ancient history to you, forgive me, as your letters are now so rare that I cannot tell how much reaches you in that peaceful Convent of Santa Chiara. As for us in the Piazza del Duomo, we are now in the very centre of life and movement; nothing can happen without an echo of the story reaching us. Our two young friends, the Cardinal Archbishop Ippolito and the splendid youth Castiglione, are frequent and welcome visitors, as my Duchess is fully alive to the importance of hearing all the latest events.

Thus the whole tragedy of last spring was discussed before us in all its bearings. The cry had been that "His Most Christian Majesty was on his way to Italy," when messengers came to tell us of his sudden and tragic death on the eve of Palm Sunday. Then, at the same time that we heard of the French King's death, so young, of apoplexy, came the terrible story from Florence of the cruel persecution and, later, of the martyr-death at the stake of Fra Girolamo, the saint and prophet, who had denounced the King of France for his shortcomings, and foretold both the loss of the Dauphin and the sad end of his royal father. Cardinal Ippolito gave us a most touching account of the indignation and grief at

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Ferrara, where Fra Savonarola was born, but he found it difficult to explain the change of feeling in his father Duke Ercole, who had always looked upon the Friar as his holy oracle and guide. The Duke did not hide his profound sorrow at his friend's tragic fate, but—either from political motives or a real belief that the Sovereign Pontiff indeed held the keys of Heaven and Hell—Ercole did not dare openly to pose as champion of Fra Girolamo. Both Ippolito and Castiglione spoke with youthful enthusiasm about the marvellous preacher, and we heard the description from an eye-witness of that last day of the Carnival, when his denunciation had the astounding effect of causing all that he called “anathema”—the cards and the dice, the indecent pictures, the lutes, the harps and musical instruments, the false hair, the perfumes and cosmetics used by women, and all other vain things—to be brought by bands of children to the Piazza della Signoria, and there burnt in a great pile, to the singing of psalms and religious hymns. Surely no sermon ever before had such immediate effect !

The death of King Charles VIII. is a serious misfortune for Duke Lodovico, who looked upon him as a firm ally. The Duke of Orleans, who is now King of France, under the name of Louis XII., has one fixed idea—that of making good his claim to the Duchy of Milan through that grandmother of whom we have heard so much, Valentine Visconti. He is said to have declared that “he would rather be Duke of Milan for a year than King of France all his life” ! His first step has been to make friends with the Pope, as he is heartless enough to insist upon a brief permitting him to divorce his gentle, pious wife Jeanne, on the plea that he was compelled to marry her by her father, Louis XI. And this after twenty years

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of wedded life ! But in fact, he wishes to marry Anne de Brétagne, the widow of his cousin Charles, and in order to secure these concessions, the King is willing to further Pope Alexander's ambition for his son, Cesare Borgia. You must have heard all the scandalous stories connected with this name, so I will not repeat them. Living at Naples, you must know that Cesare has renounced his Cardinal's hat in order to marry a Princess, and that his first attempt was Carlotta,* the cousin of my Duchess, and daughter of King Federico.

You will probably have learnt the incident from her own lips, and I cannot tell you how greatly we admire the unworldly courage of both Carlotta and her father in refusing this alliance—a piece of heroism which may cost King Federico his kingdom of Naples ; for Pope Alexander will now be his deadly foe, and will join hands with France. Already by his mediation, Cesare Borgia has turned his hopes towards the Princess Charlotte d'Albret, sister of the King of Navarre. Poor lady ! I wonder whether she will be a willing sacrifice.

July 1.—Our friend the young Cardinal has just returned from a state visit to Mantua, in the suite of the Duke Lodovico. Madonna Isabella d' Este made many anxious inquiries beforehand as to whether her guest would require her to be still in mourning for her sister ; also, whether the Duke's rooms should be hung with black velvet, or whether she might venture to use violet hangings. Three days of splendid entertainments were provided for him—comedies and tournaments—and Ippolito at least greatly enjoyed this visit to his sister.

* Carlotta had been offered in marriage to James IV., King of Scotland. She ultimately married Comte Nicolas de Laval, Governor of Brétagne. Her only daughter married François de la Trémouille.

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He came to visit my Duchess immediately on his return to Milan, for he had seen an antique bust of a woman's head, which he declared was exactly like our Lady Isabella d' Aragona. The artist Mantegna had recently brought it back from Rome, and was at first unwilling to part with it ; but I am glad to say that the Marchesa of Mantua has promised that we shall have the bust. She is also going to send my Duchess a copy by Beltraffio of the portrait of her brother Ferrante, which she has so long desired to have.

I mention this to show on what friendly terms my Lady Isabella still continues with her cousins of Este. Indeed, she is so greatly beloved that she is not wanting in friends. I told you of the pressing invitations which she has received to return to Naples, but a strong sense of duty to her son, and a lingering hope that he may some day recover his rightful position, seems to bind her here in Milan with chains of iron. If we could only read the future ! And yet in moments of serious thought, we should not dare to look into the magic glass of revelation if it were held before our eyes. Agnese, in these days of anxiety, with threatenings of war on every side, you cannot tell how longingly my thoughts travel to the peace and rest of your convent refuge. But my work is here, and you need not fear that I shall ever be false to my promise and my devoted friendship. I forgot to say that the young Cardinal brought us back a welcome present of salmon-trout, of artichokes, and a lovely basket of roses from Mantua.

Each day I pray for you that you may have all happiness on earth and the joys of Paradise beyond.

Your loving sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XLIV

IN THE CORTE VECCHIO, MILAN,

Despatched on Sunday, 1st September, 1499.

AL NOME DI DIO.

In these troubled times, my Agnese, I have no assurance when my letters will reach you, yet I find a strange comfort in writing down from time to time all that befalls us, in the hope that some day it may reach your eyes. These past months have been so full of anxiety and alarms that I scarcely know how to begin.

From the beginning, our fears of King Louis of France have been justified. Ever since he succeeded to the throne, the one desire of his heart has been to conquer Milan and recover Naples. For this he seconded the Pope's ambition for Cesare Borgia, giving him the Princess Charlotte d'Albert in marriage with much pomp in his own city of Blois,* and making him Duke of Valentinois. Having secured the help of Pope Alexander, the French King made a secret alliance with Venice, and also won over the Duke of Mantua to his service. Duke Lodovico at last became aware of his danger, and wrote imploring letters to his niece Bianca, to persuade her husband the Emperor to give him prompt assistance. But meantime the French invasion had begun in earnest, under that cruel Trivulzio, who is so feared and hated. Yet all this time, while her husband

* May 10, 1499.

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was already in the pay of King Louis, Madonna Isabella d' Este was writing the most friendly letters to Lodovico. My Duchess had been anxious to have a portrait of her cousin, who sent it to the Duke, asking his kind permission in a most affectionate manner. So the picture has reached us and, as she remarks, it certainly makes her look stout. By-the-by, talking of paintings, I must tell you that it was less than a year after her sister Beatrice's death when she wrote to Cecilia Gallerani, begging that lady to let her see a portrait of herself painted by the great Leonardo, which Cecilia most politely sent to Mantua.

Lodovico's own father-in-law, the Duke Ercole of Ferrara, will not stir a hand to help him, for fear of offending the French. But I cannot help admiring the rash loyalty of his son, the young Cardinal Ippolito, who is devoted to the Duke, and is having a wonderful suit of silvered armour made, in which he vows that he will fight for his friend. He showed my Duchess a letter which he had received as soon as his father heard the report concerning this suit of mail. "My son, you must not behave in this unseemly fashion. . . . Your taking arms would only offend our Lord God, and make Him contrary to the side you fight for. . . . All that you can do, my son, is to use your armoury of prayer ; you should have special services, and persuade all the clergy and religious to pray for the Duke Lodovico . . . for these will, indeed, be good white arms . . ." (August 7, 1499).

I am sorry to say that we have lost our young friend Castiglione, who was summoned to Mantua as soon as the war actually broke out ; for it seems that he owes some kind of feudal service to his lord, Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. He has the making of a splendid

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soldier, with his skill and valour in arms and his unrivalled horsemanship, which we have admired in more than one tournament. We must look forward to meeting this gallant, accomplished gentleman again, in happier days.

We hear that the French King has taken the title of Duke of Milan, and King of Naples and the Two Sicilies and Jerusalem. His soldiers have crossed the Alps, and are pushing on their conquests with marvellous rapidity. Every courier seems to bring fresh news of disaster for Duke Lodovico. All the fortresses in the West have fallen before the invaders, until at length they have reached the stronghold of Alessandria. Here the Duke hoped to delay them with a long siege, while he waited for the German and other friendly troops; but what was his dismay when he learnt that Galeazzo di San Severino, his trusted General, had escaped from the city—which at once surrendered—and fled to Pavia with some of the chief captains. Pavia refused to receive them within its gates, with the message that “soldiers should fight in the open field, and not in towns.” I can only state the facts as we heard them, and leave you to form your own conclusions. There is no doubt that the terribly increased taxation of late, has made Duke Lodovico hated by his subjects throughout the duchy. Even here in Milan, there have been outspoken murmurs in the streets and occasional riots, which have compelled us to barricade the Palazzo Vecchio, so that, although the people are really friendly to my Duchess, we are almost in a state of siege.

Saturday, August 31, 1499.—I scarcely know how to describe the awful scenes of tumult which took place yesterday, under our very eyes, in the Piazza del Duomo.

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There was fighting for several hours, and the Duke's treasurer, Antonio Landriano, in attempting to quiet the disturbance, was mortally wounded. Our household was in a state of panic; the windows facing the square were all shuttered and protected; but my Duchess was strangely calm and brave. Concerning this I will tell you more hereafter.

It was late last evening when we were startled by the coming of a visitor. After due precaution, a lady was admitted, while her attendants remained below in the courtyard. What was our surprise to recognize Madonna Camilla Sforza, whom we had not seen for some time. The good lady was in a state of painful excitement, and could scarcely speak for tears.

"My dear Duchessa, I am come to bid you an eternal farewell," she began. "To-morrow we set forth, I and the young Princes, for a terrible journey to Germany, that land of barbarians. But the Duke says that there is no more hope; he has appealed in vain to the citizens; his trusted captains have proved traitors, and his soldiers are deserting. Our only safety is in flight. . . ."

"Has it indeed come to this?" began my Duchess gravely.

"Yes, Madonna; but the Duke has not forgotten you," interrupted Camilla. "He has sent me to entreat that you will suffer your little Francesco to go with us. You know that I shall care for him as if he were my own child, and it is his only chance of safety while these troubles last. At the Court of the Emperor at Innsbrück you have a good friend in the Empress Bianca; indeed, this is my greatest comfort."

I was watching my lady, and clearly saw the answer written on her expressive face, flushed with fierce indig-

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nation. It needed all her self-control to reply with due courtesy.

"Can you for one moment believe, my dear Camilla, that I would part with my boy, that I would suffer my only tie in life to be carried away to distant exile? I pray you to convey my thanks to Duke Lodovico. . . ." Then, with a sudden change of manner, she spoke tender words of comfort and hope to her distracted kinswoman, promising to bear her in affectionate memory, and to send her news from Milan, if possible.

After this painful scene was at an end, we sat up late that night, and in the long, earnest talk which followed I understood more clearly than ever how my Duchess was possessed by the one desire that her son should "recover his rights." Any change—the revulsion of feeling amongst the people of Milan, the coming of the French, war and tumult—all this might once more place Francesco on the throne of his father. Her earnest faith in the future, which I could not share, was pathetic in the extreme; but it sustained her courage, and I was amazed at her almost heroic bearing. She was not dismayed even when, next morning, there came an imperious summons to meet the Duke at the Castello. For my part, I feared that there would be a renewed demand for our little Francesco who might, perhaps, be carried off by force.

Fortunately, I was mistaken, for Dionigi told us on the way, that the young Princes had started at early dawn, in the charge of Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, Cardinal San Severino (just returned from Rome), and the boys' governess, followed by a train of mules with baggage and a chariot containing the Duke's immense treasure of gold and jewels. We found the Lord Lodovico utterly

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depressed and broken down with grief at the parting from his children and the ruin of his hopes, and I must own that I pitied him from my heart. I had never known him so mild and friendly in his demeanour towards my Duchess, and even when he regretted that she had not complied with his request and sent away her Francesco to a safe refuge with his sons, he used no strong language. He simply hoped that she might not bitterly repent her decision, and warned her that the French King was not to be trusted.

“ Believe me, Madonna my niece, all who have any claim upon the lordship of Milan are looked upon by him as deadly foes. If King Louis comes to this city,” he added, with bitter meaning, “ although you will meet many old friends amongst his cringing flatterers, you and your children will be in deadly peril. Will you not listen to me even now, and, while there is yet time, escape to Genoa and take refuge on the galleys of your uncle, King Federico ?” My lady merely shook her head. She remembered the past, and would not argue with him.

I noticed that several other people were present—his secretary and notary, Francesco Visconti, Cardinal Ippolito, and others. In a fit of remorse possibly, the Duke proposed to make amends to certain persons he had wronged, and foremost amongst these was my Duchess Isabella. A deed had been prepared, which was duly signed and witnessed, by which he bestowed upon her, as compensation for her dowry, his own Duchy of Bari, in the north of Apulia, and a yearly income of 6.000 ducats. This was quite unexpected, and gave immense satisfaction to the dear lady, who was too proud to endure the thought of being a pensioner on the

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bounty of her kindred. She parted from her uncle Lodovico in more friendly fashion than I have ever believed possible, and as we hastened back to the Corte Vecchio when all was over, I noticed that her eyes were dim with tears.

Here I will end, dear Agnes, for Dionigi tells me that his brother is on the point of setting forth towards Naples with a final message from the Duke, and I dare not risk this chance of sending you a letter.

Pray for us that we may escape the perils which surround us, and do not forget to love your sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XLV

IN THE CORTE VECCHIO, MILAN,
Sunday, September 1, 1499.

AL NOME DI DIO.

DEAR AGNESE,

I know not what the future may have in store for us, but never in my life have I seen such tumult and confusion as on this Sunday. Everywhere the news had spread of the departure of the Duke's children and his treasure, and the people seem to have gone distracted with rage and dismay. The Duke Lodovico himself is in the Castello, which is so strongly fortified as to resist any attack; but the mob has hurled itself upon the palaces of the Seneschal, Messer Galeazzo, and others, sacking and destroying all they find. All has been fierce uproar; the shops are closed, and the streets blocked with barricades, while we ourselves are in a state of siege. As you must know by past experience, there is something blood-curdling in the hoarse, brutal roar of a maddened populace. . . .

Monday Evening.—Thanks be to God! All is quiet again, but we know not if it be the lull before the storm. Dionigi has been on the watch for us, and this is the news he brings: Yesterday evening he kept near the gate of the Castello, and saw Duke Lodovico commit the defence into the hands of the Castellan, Bernardino da Corte, who, with many solemn oaths and a final em-

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brace, vowed to hold out till death. Then the Duke rode forth, clad in a long black mantle, on his favourite black charger, with a few friends, towards Santa Maria delle Grazie, where he entered and remained awhile; but, possibly fearing an ambush at the city gate, he returned to the Castello as it was growing dark. However, this morning, just as the dawn was breaking, he set out quietly and secretly, accompanied by his nephew, the Lord Ermes Sforza, young Cardinal Ippolito, and a few other faithful friends, armed and on horseback, and they rode through the silent streets towards the Porta Vercellina passing out into the open road to Como, unmolested.

What say you, Agnese? Will this, indeed, be the tragic end of all his greatness, or will he return again to reign over us? As for us, we have no time to think of the future; the anxious, stirring present is all in all to our troubled hearts.

Tuesday, September 17.—Milan is in the hands of the French. On the evening of the Duke's leaving, the keys were given up to the French General, Trivulzio, who marched in by the Porta Ticinese with a company of horse. We saw him from our windows as he crossed the Piazza del Duomo amid the noisy welcome of the people, and watched him pay a kind of complimentary visit to the Cathedral before he accepted the hospitality of the Bishop of Como, his kinsman. But the Castello was so strongly fortified, so well provisioned and garrisoned, that there seemed little hope of taking it by siege, and, although Trivulzio began an attempt to storm it, he rested his main hopes on an attempt to bribe the Castellan. In this he succeeded so far beyond his hopes, that this day the traitor Bernardino surrendered this impregnable stronghold for payment of a share in the priceless treasures

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and a settled income of 2,000 ducats. All the captains of the garrison seem to have also sold their honour, excepting one man, a certain Da Rizo, who has made his escape to Germany. I hardly dare to think of Lodovico's despair when he hears how this new Judas has betrayed him. All the splendid tapestries, the pictures, the costly furnishing, the statues, the gems, the gold and silver plate, and the other treasures, priceless and unique, have been divided amongst Trivulzio, Visconti, Pallavicino, and the other traitors.

When I think of Beatrice and Lodovico in their past pomp and glory, this fall and destruction of all earthly greatness seems incredible !

Sunday, October 6.—This day has seen the crowning consummation of the French conquest—the triumphant entrance of King Louis. When he heard of the success of his arms, he left Lyons in haste, and crossed the Alps. He rested at Vercelli, remained a week in the beautiful palace of the Duke at Vigevano, and then went to Pavia, where all the time-serving lords—the Marquess of Mantua, the Duke of Ferrara, and others—assembled to meet and welcome him. To-day they are riding in state by his side, with ambassadors from all the other States of Italy except Naples. I must do my best to describe the splendid procession from the Porta Ticinese while it is fresh in my mind.

First rode the horsemen in green and red, and the magnificent guard of the French King, all knights and gentlemen, preceded by 500 archers, to the martial music of trumpets, horns, and drums, and banners flying everywhere. The King was a stately figure in a robe of purple, and a mantle of cloth of silver, embroidered with lilies of gold bearing the long-desired ducal sword and



Photo, Brogi.

Certosa of Pavia, by Cristoforo Solari.

TOMB OF LODOVICO SFORZA AND BEATRICE D'ESTE.

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cap. His *baldacchino*, lined with ermine, was carried by eight Doctors of the University, in their scarlet robes, and everywhere the streets were decked with fleurs-de-lis, and crowded with acclaiming citizens. Our children clapped their hands with delight as the procession crossed the piazza and paused in front of the Duomo, where the King dismounted and passed through under the great portico, to return thanks for his wonderful success. Then we watched as that sumptuous train of lords and gentlemen without number, prelates, Milanese, and many strangers, passed onwards through the festive decorated streets to the Castello. Amongst the throng, in a place of honour, we recognized our young friend Baldassare Castiglione, and wondered whether he would remember us.

All seems so peaceful and quiet that I think I will venture to send you this letter, as you will be anxious to hear how we have fared during this change of government. We are all well in health, and my Duchess is full of hope that nothing but good can come to the cause she has at heart, through the French conquest. The great monarch of France cannot stay here to govern, and why should not her little Francesco be the nominal Lord of Milan?

God guard and keep you, my beloved sister.

Ever your

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XLVI

IN THE CORTE VECCHIO, MILAN,

Despatched this 8th day of November, 1499.

AL NOME DI DIO.

AGNESE CARISSIMA,

After the stormy and troubled incidents described in my last letter, you will think that, since the coming of the French King, we are having quite a gay and peaceful time. My Duchess has put aside her mourning, and looks quite young and beautiful again in some of her splendid dresses, which she wears in honour of King Louis and the many noble Princes and kinsmen who come to visit her. Amongst these is her uncle, Duke Ercole of Ferrara; his son Alfonso, who married and lost poor Anna Sforza; young Ferrante d' Este; and in highest favour of all with the King is Francesco Gonzaga, the husband of Isabella d' Este. Besides these, I must mention our courteous friend, Baldassare Castiglione, who shows us every attention in his power, and Niccolò da Correggio, the prince and poet, always a great admirer of my Duchess from her childhood. Everyone speaks with the greatest horror of the treachery of the Castellan Bernardino—even the French captains, who are amazed at the wonderful fortifications of the Castello, and feel certain it could not have been taken by assault.

On the day after his arrival the King attended Mass in great state at the ancient church of San Ambrogio, where

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the Emperors used to be crowned with the iron crown of Lombardy. It was a magnificent spectacle, with all the Princes and great nobles, the ambassadors and Cardinals in their stately robes ; and little Francesco, who went with me, could hardly contain his delight. He does so love a fine spectacle. On the Tuesday the Marquess of Mantua got up a hunting-party for the French monarch, who seems to have had good sport and greatly enjoyed himself. He has also visited the church and convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, and was so enthusiastic over the wonderful painting of the Last Supper, that he seriously considered whether he might not have it removed to France. This, of course, would be impossible, as it is painted on the wall itself ; but I am thankful that Messer Leonardo was away in the country, and did not hear the suggestion, which was an outrage. Between ourselves, I believe these French are somewhat of barbarians, for we hear much of the filthy state of the rooms in the Castello given up to the French captains, and the soldiers are intolerable in the city. Yet, for all this, there is no doubt that King Louis is far more capable and a better ruler than the late pleasure-loving King Charles, and has the gift of making himself popular. He behaves with genial friendliness at the various banquets given in his honour ; he joins with eagerness in the hunting-parties ; and he has won golden opinions by standing godfather to a Borromeo baby, upon whom he bestowed a costly gold necklace.

This incident has greatly impressed my Duchess, who looks upon the King as a kind-hearted man, with a genial love for young children. He has already taken special notice of little Francesco, who was pointed out to him one day ; and my lady has at last made up her mind to

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take the boy to the Castello, that he may pay homage to the present ruler of Milan.

Monday, October 28.—To-day we have taken a step which may prove of undreamed-of importance, and my heart is full of anxious dread. Agnese, I can hardly describe our little Francesco, as we dressed him out in his Court suit of green velvet and cloth of gold for his first appearance at Court. He was the prettiest thing you ever saw, with the profile of an angel, rather long curly dark hair, his skin smooth and fresh as a rose, and those great dark dreamy eyes. As you know, he is now in his ninth year, tall for his age, and bears himself with unconscious grace, like a little Prince. He is very simple and young for his years, but he has his father's passion for fine clothes, for dogs and horses. His mother had made him understand that he was going to see a great King, and that he was to behave with due courtly manners, and when, after some waiting, he was ushered into the presence chamber, it was a picture to see him make his obeisance and kiss the hand extended to him. The King was evidently quite charmed with our Francesco, and there was murmured applause from all the courtiers round. He was petted and made much of, and fed with sweetmeats, pine-seeds, comfits, and marzipan, which he loves. Meantime the King spoke most kindly to my Duchess, and expressed his pleasure in meeting her.

When the time came for us to leave and we were on the point of departing, with due respect, His Majesty drew Francesco towards him and said with a smile: "We must be better acquainted, my boy. Will you stay with me awhile, and see my soldiers, and my horses, and my dogs?"

With a beaming face full of innocent trust, the child

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joyfully agreed, and I remember watching how his eager outstretched fingers were caught in the strong hand of the King, glittering with costly rings. There was an embarrassed silence in the great chamber, and all eyes were turned towards the Duchess, who seemed quite overwhelmed with this unexpected honour. She turned as though to express her thanks, but before she had time to speak, King Louis rose hastily from his chair of state and, with a courtly bow, threw open wide the door, repeating his farewell with many gracious and friendly words.

This somewhat abrupt but most loving dismissal struck me as a masterpiece of diplomacy, thus avoiding any affectionate leave-taking between the mother and son which might have awakened a fresh impulse in the child's volatile nature; for I had seen that day in our poor darling the very image of his father. He had betrayed the same love of show, of fine clothes, of dainty food; the same weak yielding to the first offer of pleasure, with no thought of the morrow. . . . Ah me!

Before we quite knew how it had happened, we found ourselves in the outer hall, pompously ushered with all deference by pages in the royal livery towards the gateway, where our horses and grooms were in waiting. As we set forth homewards, my Duchess exclaimed excitedly: "Violante, did you ever see anyone more gallant and princely than our Francesco? Can we wonder that he is so much admired and sought after?"

Taken by surprise, when my thoughts had wandered so far afield, I paused and she went on impatiently: "You never give the dear boy credit for his real intelligence and courtly manners. I know that Bona is your favourite. . . ." I hastened to make some meek and

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suitable reply, for my instinct told me that this sharpness of tone revealed misgivings on the part of my dear lady, which she dared not own even to herself.

There was no time for intimate talk that evening, as the baggage of the young Prince had to be carefully selected for this visit to the French King, however brief it might be, and it must be sent to the Castello at once in the care of his personal attendants. But now, my Agnese, I can sit down, late at night, to write out for you all that has taken place, in the hope that thus I may ease the burden from my soul. I dare not add another word of comment, lest I should be tempted to dwell too much upon the anxious fears which are clamouring within my heart.

Thursday, November 7.—Dies nefaste. Agnese ! Agnese ! Why did I keep silence ? Why did I not cry aloud from the housetop my alarms and forebodings ? I have sinned ! I have sinned ! May God forgive me !

How can I write the story of despair ? My Duchess is robbed of her boy ; our darling Francesco has been ruthlessly taken from her by the French King, when he rode forth this day through the gates of Milan. You will say that it is impossible, it is incredible ; and so indeed it seemed to us, for we can yet scarcely realize the terrible truth.

Ever since the fatal day of our visit to the Castello, a dark cloud of gloom and depression seems to have hung over this dreary old palace. Strangely enough, no one came near us ; the visits of my lady's noble friends and kinsmen were at an end, and there seemed to be a conspiracy of silence to keep us in ignorance of outside news. The faithful Dionigi has been sent each day to the Castello with a letter or message to the " Duchetto," as he loves to call him ; but he always returned with the same answer :

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that the little Prince was well and happy, and in the highest favour with the King. Yet he never saw his young master ; some excuse was always given.

I believe this has been a time of agony to my Duchess, for I have constantly surprised her in tears ; but her courage was indomitable, and she would not give voice to her secret anxiety. She always sat by the window which looks out towards the Castello, and every day she made ready for her boy's return. But there was a restless, haggard look in her face which betrayed her, and now that this calamity has befallen us, I should not dare to say that it was quite unlooked for. Her grief and despair are terrible to behold ; she has sent swift couriers with heart-breaking letters of appeal to the French tyrant ; she has offered bribes of all her worldly goods ; but nothing is of any avail. It is like a fragile bird beating itself to pieces against a stone wall.

I can write no more. Pray for us, my Agnese, in this hour of utter desolation, which casts all bygone sorrows into the shade.

Your most unhappy sister,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

LETTER XLVII

IN THE CASTELLO DEL CORTE, MANTUA,
Candlemas Day, 1500.

AL NOME DI DIO.

MOST EXCELLENT AND DEAREST SISTER,

As you see, we have already left Milan, and have travelled as far as Mantua on our way home—for so our dear Southern land, where my Agnese dwells, will always seem to me. You will already have received the letter written by her own hand, in which my Duchess prays you to join us when we reach Naples, and to remain henceforth her cherished companion and friend. Think what this will be to me, to have you by my side and under my loving care, and to abide in your sweet company until death shall part our bodies, but not our souls. I can scarcely believe that such happiness will indeed be ours, that there will be no more need of letters to keep us in touch with each other, and that *this one* will be in all likelihood my last. I must do my best to make it worthy of the occasion and, besides the sad story of our troubles, tell you all about this beautiful place, and any other news which gives so much pleasure to your kind nuns. How they will miss you at Santa Chiara!

I know how deep your sympathy will have been with the tragic story of our cruel loss. But when a grim phantom lives ever with you, day and night, sleeping and

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waking, your heart cannot fail to become, in a measure, inured and deadened to any grief. So it has been with my dear lady. After the first crushing blow, when she had exhausted every human effort to recover her boy, she bowed before the inevitable, and has been wonderful in her courage and fortitude. In those early days of despair she could not endure the sight of her little girls : they reminded her too much of their lost brother ; but now they are always with her, and she takes simple human comfort in their pretty ways. Bona, who is now seven years old, is well advanced in her studies, and even little Ippolita also inherits her mother's brightness and cleverness, so that it is a pleasure to teach them.

When once my poor Duchess had learnt the bitter lesson that her passionate ambition for Francesco was utterly hopeless, she realized that there was nothing to keep her in the city where he would never reign. Besides, it would have been impossible for us to remain long in Milan after the King had left, for Trivulzio was such a stern task-master and the French soldiers behaved so shamefully, that there were constant risings amongst the people, who hated their new rulers. With wise decision, Madonna has closed this chapter of her life, dismissed with due rewards all her household, with the exception of a few faithful servants like Dionigi, and left directions for the sale of all her possessions, save those treasures which she valued too much to part with.

A kind invitation had come to her from her cousin, Isabella d' Este, that she would pay a visit to Mantua before going to Genoa, from whence we are to travel by sea to Naples. We set forth from Milan on a bitter wintry morning under a dark and gloomy sky, in harmony with our sad thoughts and memories of the past.

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In the short December day, it was as much as we could do to reach Pavia, that once beautiful pleasure city, now, alas ! cruelly changed and disfigured by the siege. Next morning we sailed down the river to Piacenza, and, with much wretched tossing and discomfort, after some days came to Borgoforte, whence, in rough country carts, we continued our way to Mantua, for the River Mincio, which almost surrounds the city, was covered with ice. In the midst of the lakes and flat, marshy country, beloved of Virgil, stands the splendid Castello of the Gonzagas, where we received a hearty welcome when we arrived, half starved and frozen. The little girls had suffered greatly from the cold and exposure, but everything was forgotten in the delight of warm fires and dry beds and comfortable meals.

We have been here now for several weeks, and the Marchesa Isabella has been kindness itself. I quite understand how it is that no one can resist the charm of her manner and conversation, although I must own that I wondered how my Duchess could look upon a time-server, who flattered the French King and loaded him with presents, as a friend of hers. The Lady Isabella d' Este has such an amazing passion for collecting treasures that she has actually written most friendly letters to some of the traitors who sold the Castello of Milan to the French, imploring them to send her various works of art, above all the wonderful clavichord made by Lorenzo da Pavia for her dead sister Beatrice. She is always trying to find out from my Duchess any clue as to what has become of various magnificent jewelled "camoras" which had belonged to Beatrice, and especially a certain robe of gold and silver tissue on which the lighthouse towers of Genoa were embroidered ; a vest of cloth of

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gold, worked in red and blue silk; and other precious things. The Marchesa is certainly of a grasping nature, for it seems to me that all the good things of this world are already piled upon her! If you could only see her *Camerini* crowded with every wonder of ancient and modern art, with statues, pictures, priceless gems, cameos, rare instruments of music, such as the silver lyre of Atalante . . . the wonderful collection of books and manuscripts, precious classics, histories, *novelle*, and all the latest French romances.

You will remember her as a child at Naples when, by some witchcraft, she always managed to have the best of everything. As I saw her to-day—in a robe of crimson velvet trimmed with grey fur, lightly tripping into the *Studiolo*, her own exquisite private chamber, with a group of pet dogs—each worth a King's ransom—trotting at her feet, you would have declared that she had indeed all that heart could desire. What a contrast to my poor lady, sitting mute and sad by the fire, in her mourning garb, to which she went back on the day her son was taken away, and which she will never change until he is restored to her. She remains even here in absolute seclusion, seeing no one save that holy woman, the Beata Osanna, of whose visit to Milan I told you long ago. The famed Dominican nun seems to breathe an atmosphere of calm and holy peace, and has quite renewed her former influence upon my Duchess, for which may Heaven bless her! By-the-by, I must tell you that the Marchesa is expecting another child, and Suora Osanna has foretold to her the crowning joy of a son.* So far she has only a little daughter, Leonora, a delightful child of eight, who is a charming companion for Bona

* Her son Federico was born on May 17, 1500.

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and baby Ippolita, and at this moment they make a fascinating picture before me, at play together with the last batch of priceless Persian kittens.

The Marchesa Isabella has a friendly memory of me in the past, and has taken me about in attendance upon her to pay various interesting visits, amongst others to the mother of our friend Castiglione, Madonna Aloisia, a lady of great beauty and accomplishment, who was gratified to hear our praise of her son. You will exclaim when I tell you that we also went to call upon two refugees from Milan, both ladies formerly notorious for their connection with Duke Lodovico : Madonna Cecilia Gallerani, now Contessa Bergamini, with her handsome boy of nine, Cesare Sforza. She seems but little changed from former days. The other is the later favourite, Lucrezia Crevelli, who showed us with much pride her beautiful little son of three and a half years old, Gian Paolo Sforza. Strange to tell, Lodovico has always treated these two illegitimate sons with the same affection as those of his wife Beatrice. If such is the morality of Courts, it is well for us, Agnese, that we are going to dwell in the far-off seclusion of beautiful Bari, the future home and firm possession of my Duchess. I must tell you, in private, that the Marchesa has tried to induce me by bribes to enter her service ; but I need not record my reply ! If all tales be true, she has had much trouble with her ladies-in-waiting, more especially as the Marchese, her husband, is not without reproach.

To-morrow, Agnese, we set forth on our journey to Genoa, where the heavy baggage has already preceded us, and where we are to find the galleys waiting for us which King Federico has so generously provided. May we have more propitious weather for our voyage home

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than on that eventful wedding journey ! Twelve long years crowded with events, burdened with many sorrows, have passed since I left you, and now, by strange and devious ways, am I led back to your side.

To think that I shall so soon be with you, my Agnese ! It is too wonderful and beautiful to be true. " Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,"* shall we meet like disembodied spirits and sing together with one voice that glorious psalm, " In exitu Israel de Egitto," like the pilgrims of Dante, steered across the waters of Lethe by the celestial pilot ?

Then, side by side, in faithful love and service to my dear lady, we will pass on to the earthly paradise of our desire, that sea-girt city of Bari, with its fair terraces and gardens, basking in the golden sunshine of the South. *A rivederci*, my beloved, not farewell.

Your sister in hope,

VIOLANTE DA CANOSSA.

* The opening words of Dante's vision (" In the middle of our life's journey").

EPILOGUE

HERE end the letters of Violante to Agnese, for the two sisters are supposed to be at last united, and we take our leave of the wise, brave-hearted lady-in-waiting as she passes away into the dim shadows of the might-have-been.

It now remains briefly to tell the rest of the story of Isabella d' Aragona, at present Duchess of Bari, after she leaves the scene of active, eventful life, to retire into the backwater of mere peaceful existence in her beautiful home on the coast of the Adriatic. But this poor lady, who signed herself "Ysabella de Aragonia Sforzia, unica in disgrazia," was not beyond the reach of fresh sorrow, for in 1501 she lost her younger daughter Ippolita, and henceforth all her care and all her love were lavished upon Bona, who became one of the most accomplished and learned princesses of Renaissance days.

Yet even in this last refuge of the sorely tried Duchess, there were constant rumours and alarms of war. By a shameful treaty, Louis XII. of France and King Ferdinand of Spain divided the kingdom of Naples between them, and after a vain defence, King Federico* was compelled to resign his throne in order to save his subjects from further calamities. Then, in 1502, the robber Kings of France and Spain quarrelled over their spoil,

* On August 25, 1501. He died in France, September 9, 1504.

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and there came a day in June when the French General, the Duke of Adria, proposed to besiege the city and seaport of Bari. But chivalry still lived in knightly hearts, and the gallant Captain Yves d'Allègre protested against making war upon a lady of such high renown and so many misfortunes as the Duchess of Bari. His suggestion of attacking Barletta instead, where honour might be won by fighting the great Captain Gonzolvo, was supported by Bayard and La Palisse, and the lady Castellan of Bari was spared. It is interesting to remember a similar chivalrous appeal on the part of Yves d'Allègre when, a year before, he had ridden into Rome with only three companions to demand of the dread Pope Alexander VI. the release of Caterina Sforza, Countess of Forli, from the dungeon of St. Angelo, declaring in the name of France that "*on n'emprisonne pas les dames.*"*

As the years passed away, Isabella d' Aragona had frequent news of her son Francesco in his far-off exile. He was kindly treated under the King's guardianship, and he was being trained for the monastic life ; but this appears to have had many alleviations, and he was said to be well and happy. In time he was appointed Abbot of Noirmoutiers, whose monastery was situated in the little sandy island on the coast of La Vendée—a safe habitation for a State prisoner. Then, in 1511, the young Abbot, Francesco Sforza, barely twenty-one years of age, was killed one day out hunting, his favourite amusement. So ended all his mother's passionate hopes and longings.

But, strange to say, Milan seems still to have had an invincible fascination for the exiled Duchess. Some

* "*Romance of a Medici Warrior*," Christopher Hare, p. 25.

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years later, when she met Isabella d' Este in Naples, she was most eager to arrange, with her cousin the Marchesa's help, a marriage between her only daughter Bona and the young Duke Massimiliano of Milan, the son of Lodovico Sforza. But this wedding never took place, for the proposed bridegroom lost his duchy after the decisive battle of Marignano. It is curious to read that the young widow (and aunt) of King Ferrante of Naples had also been suggested as a bride for Duke Massimiliano.

The Princess Bona ultimately married, in 1518, Sigismund I., King of Poland. We have a most interesting word-portrait of this Prince by no less a person than the Emperor Maximilian, who, two years earlier, was thinking of Sigismund as a possible bridegroom for his eldest granddaughter, Eléonore (afterwards the wife of François I.).* The Emperor is writing to his daughter Marguerite, and informs her that the Queen of Poland is dead, and thus describes the widowed King: "... Le dit roy de Polan est ung belle personage un peu grasselet; toutefois ly ne sera jamès plus grass; ung visage et cors blank, et les mains fort blans, le grandeur du seigneur de Berges . . . ung visage plus beau que de M. de Berges; car son visage est cler et fort honeste. . . . Il est, cumme yl m'a dit de sa bouche, qui est belle et ruge, de l'eage de quarante six ans . . . un pu les cheveux gris desja. . . ." He could talk German and Latin, was much beloved by his people, and had a great warlike kingdom, with 100,000 fighting men.

Bona was born in January, 1493; she was therefore twenty-five years old at the date of her wedding, and was

* "Marguerite of Austria," Christopher Hare, p. 226. Harper Brothers.



BONA SFORZA, QUEEN OF POLAND.
Old Print.

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thought of a very suitable age for the second wife of a man of forty-eight. She was married by proxy to King Sigismund in Naples, where she had a very splendid reception, on December 6, 1517. The city and province were now ruled by a Viceroy for the young Archduke Charles (King of Spain since the death of Ferdinand, in 1516). A magnificent banquet was given in honour of the young Princess and the Polish ambassadors, when, on quitting the church, they all sat down to table at two in the afternoon, and began to eat, and continued until eleven o'clock at night. There was a stupendous menu, and twenty-seven courses are enumerated. The bill of fare lies before me, and I notice "Hungary soup, stuffed peacocks, quince pies, thrushes stuffed with bergamot, pheasants and capons, various kinds of fish, marzipan, silver jars of preserved pine-seeds, and many outlandish barbarian meats . . . most strangely mingled. It is interesting to know that Vittoria Colonna was present at this barbaric dinner, which lasted nine hours.

We are told that Bona looked very beautiful in a Venetian robe of sky-blue satin, embroidered with golden bees, while on her head she wore a diadem of pearls and precious stones. No doubt her wedding-chests contained all the gorgeous robes and mantles and vests, and most of the beautiful jewels, which her mother had worn in those bygone days at the Court of Naples. The bride left Naples on December 26 for Manfredonia, whence she embarked on the last day of February, and arrived on April 10, 1518, at Cracovia, where King Sigismund met her with great pomp, and entertained her with another banquet, which lasted eight hours !

After the marriage of her daughter it must have been

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a lonely life for the poor Duchess of Bari. We are told that she devoted much time and thought to the good of her subjects, by whom she was greatly beloved ; that she had friends in Naples to whom she paid occasional visits, and there she died, in 1524, six years after Bona's departure, at the age of fifty-three. She was buried in the ancient church of San Domenico Maggiore, by the side of her beloved brother, King Ferrante, and his widow, Juana.*

Her daughter Bona, who inherited the Duchy of Bari, returned there when she became a widow, in 1548, " notwithstanding the prayers of her son and daughters," as the old chronicler tells us. When we remember those tremendous banquets, and consider all that such barbarous customs must have meant to a Princess brought up with the refinement, the artistic and literary tastes of the somewhat *précieuse* ladies of the Renaissance, our surprise is not at Queen Bona leaving Poland as soon as she was free, but at her having endured that uncivilized country so long.

We are told that on her return to the beautiful home of her youth, she held a brilliant Court there, frequented by artists, poets, and learned men, amongst whom was Scipione Ammirato, who spent some time at Bari on his way to Lecce.† Bona died in November, 1558, in her sixty-fifth year, and was buried with great mourning in the ancient priory church of San Nicolo di Bari, where her splendid tomb may still be seen. She is represented in white marble, kneeling on the black marble sarcophagus, while in niches behind, are statues of the Polish saints, S. Casimir and S. Stanislaus.

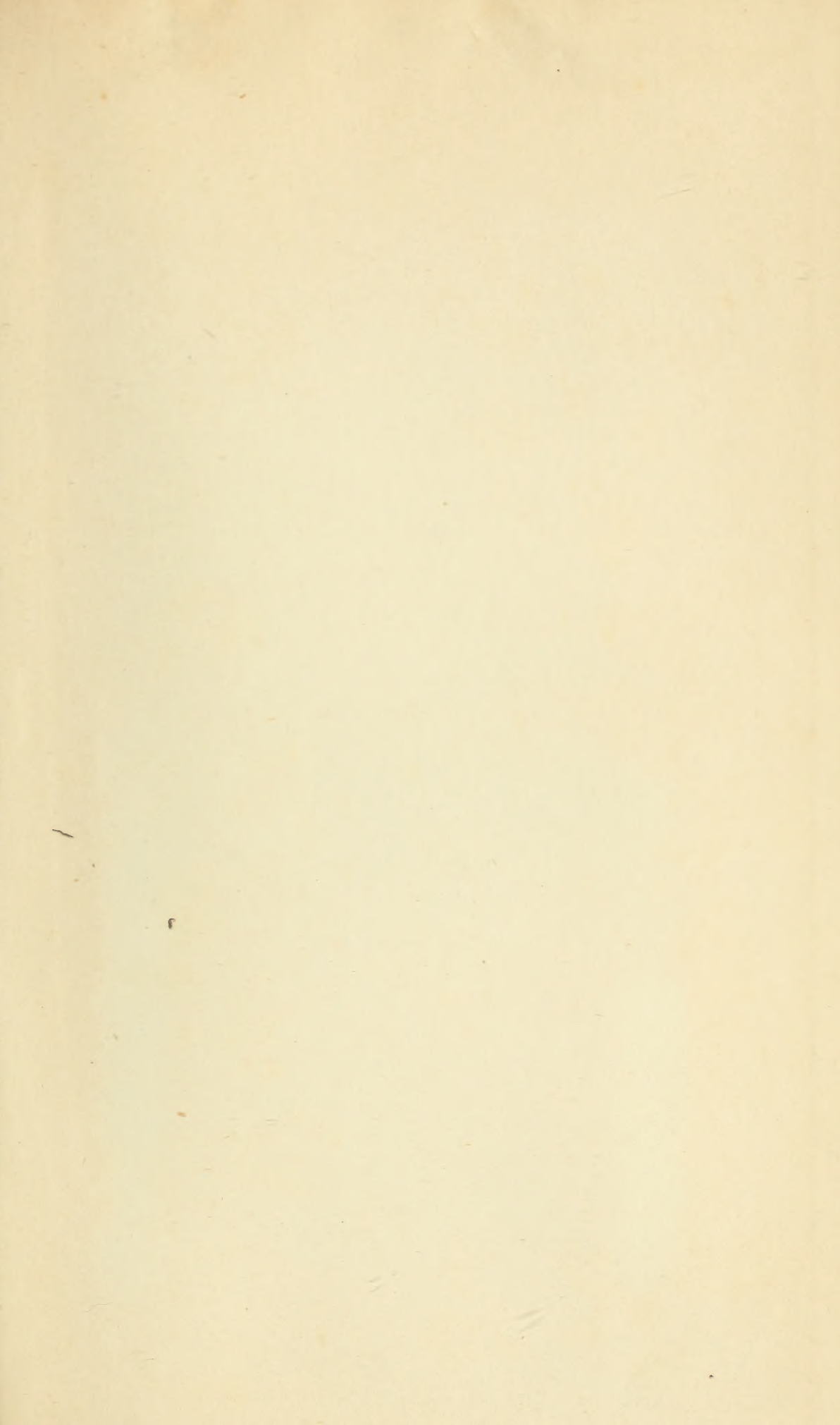
* She died in 1518.

† On the Adriatic coast, below Brindisi.

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Bona Sforza, Dowager Queen of Poland, left her duchy and dependencies to Philip II., King of Spain and Naples, probably in the hope of assuring peace and prosperity to her people. She was the last of her race, having outlived both her cousins, Massimiliano and Francesco, Dukes of Milan.

THE END



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Andrews, Marian.
Isabella of Milan,
Princess d'Aragona, and
wife of Duke Gian
Galeazzo Sforza :

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